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O'CASEY'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO HIS DRAMA

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "O'Casey's Autobiographies and Their Relationship to His Drama," submitted by Joanne Irene Kregosky in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



O'CASEY'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO HIS DRAMA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the form and technique of Sean O'Casey's autobiographies, not only to determine their dramatic qualities, but also to demonstrate the close relationship between the autobiographies and the O'Casey plays. This is approached, first, by an examination of O'Casey's dramatic principles, concepts which he emphasized in articles, letters, and conversations about his plays. These form the basis of his literary style and determine the distinctive qualities of the autobiographies as well as the Secondly, keeping in mind these dramatic principles, the style of the autobiographies is examined, first with respect to structure, and then, in the following chapter, technique. It is proposed that the structure of the books arises, not from an external literary form imposed upon them, but rather from the material of the books themselves. Freed from the rules of genre, their very expression becomes their struc-Thirdly, (as mentioned above), the technique of the ture. autobiographies is discussed as a further expression of this It is a mixture of characteristics of all genres, form. blended together to bring forth the theme and subject of the books as notes bring forth a symphony. Finally, there follows a discussion of O'Casey's dramatic style and its development from the early plays to the last, and a comparison of this



development with the style of the autobiographies to reveal, once again, the close relationship between the plays and the autobiographies.



INTRODUCTION

I'm just a wandering road-minstrel, singing an odd song at any cross-roads where a few people may have gathered together; an odd song in the form of a play, a few thoughts set out in the form of an article, or a song in the form of the song itself.

Sean O'Casey1

This is the way O'Casey liked to portray himself - as a man who sings his song as naturally as the lark sends forth its call, as a man of spontaneous expression who was fully in tune with the rhythm of life. Although his creations - dramas, articles, poems, and songs - were not as spontaneous in their creation as he often implies, the quotation is accurately descriptive of both the initiating spirit and the end result of O'Casey's art - an art filled with the drama of spontaneity, the anticipation of the moment, the uneven expectation of what will happen next.

'Song' is an important word to O'Casey, because it suggests the patterned movement of words to music, a union he thought greatly creative. He liked to think of his literary works as rhythmic achievements, as patterns of pictures, words, action and song. In fact, he compared his last play, The Drums of Father Ned, to Strauss's music for Don Quixote:

. . . and the form was an effort to do something like what R. Strauss did in his music to Don Chichote [sic], picture following picture in sounds of lovely music. The play tries to show



some dramatic pictures of present-day Ireland; of course, the drama form is no way comparable to Strauss' lovely creation, tho' when I was writing it, I didn't think of Strauss, hadn't even heard it; but some time ago, I listened to Strauss, and said to myself - 'That's something like what I aimed at doing in The Drums of Father Ned.²

To O'Casey, the expression of the artist should be as natural to him as the song is to the bird, not a mechanically developed expression following pre-conceived rules. To use an O'Casey metaphor, it would be like the spontaneous flashes of a jewel turned in the hand, each flash originating from the jewel itself, and characteristic of it. Somehow, in this spontaneous way, the work of the artist must be expressive of that all-encompassing word, life.

Life to O'Casey is the will to surge forward, humanity's impetus, imp, genius, animus, instigator, beginning. It is man's inherent right to live as he wishes, to be allowed to act and express himself naturally, to be able to fulfil his creation. And, very important, life should always create more life, be it organic or artistic.

So, O'Casey creates. In the form of a song, in the shape of an article, within the frame of a narrative, he sings forth six volumes of creative autobiography, using Sean the author as a source for Sean the character. Writing over a period of approximately sixteen years, and setting forth nearly seventy-four years of experience, he uses a very vital past-



present tense to give a strong sense of immediacy to the books.

There is much essential drama in the incidents of the autobiographies, and it is well supported by O'Casey's dramatic style. The drama of the child growing to age immediately arouses anticipatory questions in the mind of the reader. This framework also produces a strong sense of destiny, a sense which "appears most striking, where man seems to be a plaything of forces quite beyond his control."3 Because Sean fights against what he thinks this destiny has in mind for him, the autobiographies have, from the beginning, a character in conflict with the physical and mental environment surrounding him. This conflict becomes a part of the drama of contrast in the autobiographies - the contrast between tragedy and comedy, between light and dark, between beautiful and ugly, between life and death. O'Casey identifies himself with the first of each of these pairs, the affirmative sense, and continually engages in conflict with a world he thinks is set to destroy his values. The contrast also expresses the constant battle between the two forces of life and anti-life: O'Casey expressing through his persona his vision of life, and through repressive characters, ideals, and institutions, the dangerous forces of anti-life.

Each title of the six volumes comprising the autobiography is titled figuratively to image forth each period of
Sean's life. I Knock at the Door, the appropriate title



of the first book, indicates a beginning: the portrayal of O'Casey's early years in the world, and second, an attitude: he will knock at the door, meeting the world aggressively, until it is "opened unto him". Of course, the title brings to mind Jesus, the Bible, and the world of Christianity, a force that penetrated young Johnny's mind and filled him with its images, if not its convictions, for the remainder of his life. This book takes us from Johnny's birth (1880) to his tenth year.

Having knocked at the door, and entered the house, Sean now pauses in his teen-age years, to look around, to gather impressions. So the second book is titled <u>Pictures in the Hallway</u>. Here Johnny watches the pictures of the world in kaleidoscopic scenes, and brings the audience into the vision of the young boy who has to face an adult world, to take employment, suffer discipline, and discover controversies which at first mean little to him.

The title of the third book is <u>Drums Under the Windows</u>, a title which perfectly suggests the part of a civilian caught in a war - a person whose house becomes his bomb shelter, where he listens through walls for danger, and hears the drums pass by in the street, under the windows. The turmoil here is not only the physical battle of men in Ireland's streets, but also the inner turmoil of Sean's feelings (he has now taken the Gaelic name for John, which is Sean). His involvement in the



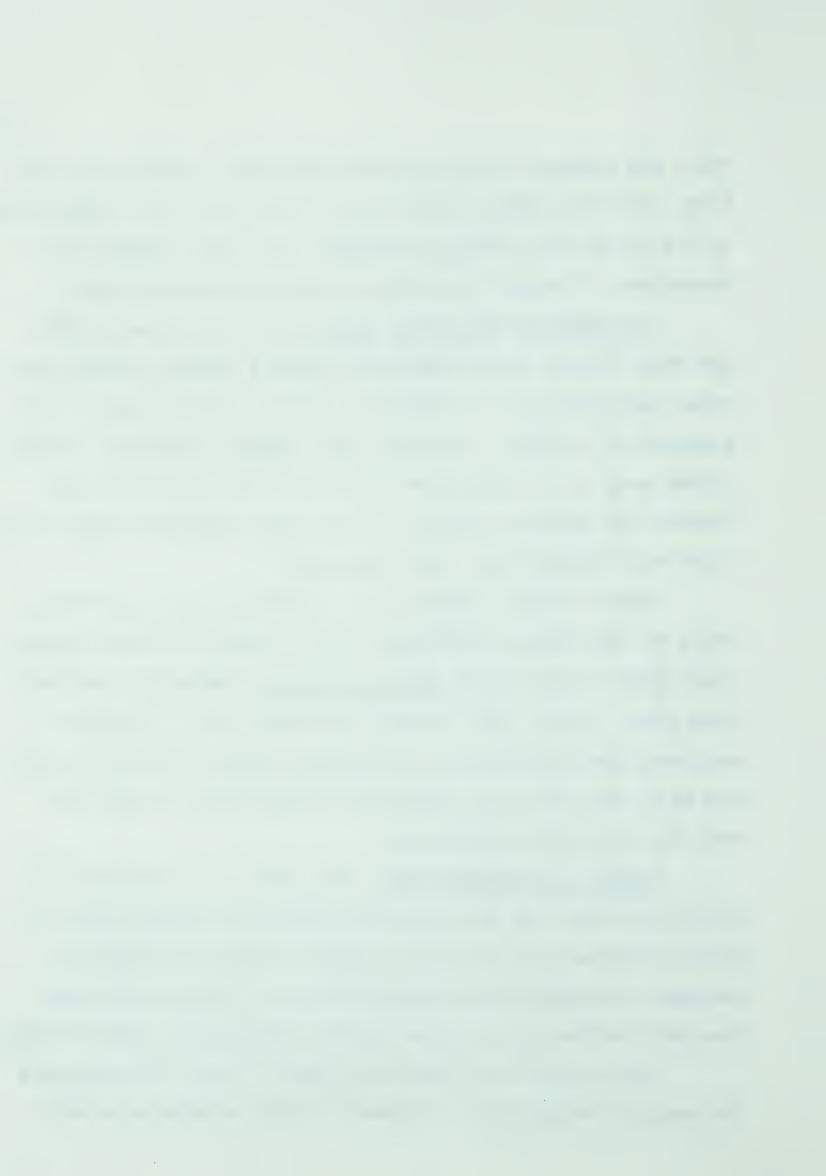
color and action of the turbulent political currents and warfare around him impress upon him the value of life, played here
by the invincible tenement dwellers, who live, timorous yet
determined, through the pattern of death and destruction.

Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well brings us to near middle age with O'Casey as he begins his writing career and ends his vital participation in Ireland's trouble, withdrawing to the position of a critic. As the title implies, he leaves Ireland, forced away by its ignorance and venom, yet the title also implies his fervent concern for the only country he would consider his: 'Inishfallen, fare thee well'.

Next O'Casey, perhaps a bit miscast as the Irish Rose, sails to the Crown of England, and his experiences are chronicled forth in the volume Rose and Crown. These are the years from 1926 - 1934, when O'Casey was fifty-four, a slightly mellowed growing-older-man, blossoming into the crown of life, now with wife and child and busily establishing a home, as well as a literary reputation.

Sunset and Evening Star, the last of the volumes, the end of the day, and the waning of the life, continues most of Sean's debates with the world, until in its last chapter it becomes a poignant and nostalgic lyric of the last days and the last battles and the last words, bringing the life to 1954.

Life itself was drama to O'Casey. Thus, he emphasizes the artist's expression of himself at the expense of a well



organized structure and technique. After his first articles and early plays (in other words, once he learned the rules)

O'Casey rebelled against the "rules" of literature that implied the necessity of a certain formula for a work of art. He became convinced that dramatic imagination was of primary importance and that technique should be totally subservient to this imagination.

For this reason his books have a looseness of structure. There is no carefully ordered plot development, and no linking passages between scenes or chapters. Instead, there is constant juxtaposition and contrast of scene, of action and of genre. He uses whatever method he needs to express himself. As a result, critics often find it difficult to describe (and sometimes to understand) his work. W.A. Armstrong, in his introduction to Classic Irish Drama makes the attempt in this way: "...O'Casey is as topical as the realists, as tragisatiric as Synge, and as mythopoeic in essence as Yeats is in Cathleen ni Houlihan."

This apparent looseness of structure was not an organized attempt at impressionism or expressionism on O'Casey's part. It was rather an attempt to simply ignore what he considered unimportant. This included the confinement of drama in a static form, the reduction of its fantasy by forcing realism upon it or the repression of imagination for the sake of "rules".



For these reasons, the body of this thesis begins with a chapter examining O'Casey's dramatic principles and the concepts which formed his style; next are two chapters which deal with the distinctive structure of the autobiographies; then, in the last chapter, the six volumes of the autobiographies, and their style and development, are compared with the style and development of O'Casey's plays. This chapter is followed by a conclusion and summation.



CHAPTER I

THE DRAMATIC PRINCIPLES OF SEAN O®CASEY

Sean O'Casey's autobiographies are not always factually and historically correct. They are not a collection of concise and egocentric memories. They are not disclosed in the form of the first-person recollection. Although they begin as a novel, they do not adhere strictly to the rules of that genre. Although the consciousness begins with what Robert Hogan calls a double focus (that is. the author both as omniscient and in Johnny), it does not remain within this The voice throughout the volumes does not remain boundary. the steady voice of the aged man recalling his past, but rather progresses from that of the voice of a small child of the past to the voice of the old man of the present. They do not merely voice the past, but the presentness of the past. In fact, the autobiographies do not do most of the things expected of that genre, and it must be conceded that O'Casey has done it again: all the rules are broken in his effort to express his own life in his own unique way.

O'Casey, with the Irishman's appreciation of fantasy, magic, and myth, says 'to Hell with realism', yet many of the basic criteria for realistic or conventional drama are found



in his dramas and in his autobiographies. These will be discussed in the ensuing chapters - the sense of immediacy in the books, the dash-dialogue, the multiple focus of the author, the settings, the acts, the scenes, and so on.

It is the structure, technique, and use of persona which are far from realism. Not based on a single plot of developing action, the structure for the books is provided by their subject and philosophy. There is no four-step plot development with only one complication or crisis, and one climax. O'Casey substitutes a more complex pattern for this simple plot development. Robert Hogan, in his book The Experiments of Sean O'Casey describes O'Casey's style as digression rather than compactness. Describing O'Casey's play Cock-a-Doodle-Dandy he writes:

The plot is not so much a casually connected story, as it is a story which consistently halts its forward advance to digress or to introduce new characters for satiric purpose. It rambles, it is leisurely, and it makes full use of the fantasy with which O'Casey had begun to experiment in Oak Leaves and Lavender. 1

By using every mode of expression, every genre he felt necessary to further the expression of this structure, and by using a complicated persona, O'Casey continually shifts his relationship with his audience. The introduction to The Play and the Reader states:

The generic differences that distinguish the performed play from the spoken poem and the silently read novel can best be understood by imagining the



differing spatial relationships among the author, the characters, and the audience. In the epic poem, the poet spoke directly to his audience; his characters did not appear at all. In the lyric poem, a solitary voice is heard; whether or not that voice is the poet's the poet himself remains hidden, while we overhear a disembodied voice. In the novel or short story, the reader actually sees neither the author nor his characters. But what distinguishes drama from all other literary genres is the acting out of the story by its characters directly before us, and always in the present tense; in a play the characters are alone with each other, in the presence of a witnessing audience.²

The autobiography contains elements of all the genres mentioned above. The author does speak directly to his audience in the absence of other characters, as in the epic form; a lyric, solitary, and visionary voice is often heard; the books, set up as novels, stop the reader from actually physically seeing the author or his characters; and, as in drama, the reader does have the sense that the characters are alone with one another, acting in the presence of a witnessing audience. Accordingly, O'Casey's audience is sometimes a confidant, sometimes an onlooker, sometimes one of the crowd, sometimes a friend, and sometimes an enemy. At times, O'Casey is with the audience, watching, or he is firmly within himself speaking directly to his audience. The angles of perspective, the distances between him and his listener-watcher are always shifting. At times he gives the reader direct commands: as for instance, when he commands: "Twist the cap



of the kaleidoscope, and see what it's like" in <u>Drums Under</u> the <u>Window</u>.

O'Casey's dramatic principles can be seen to underly these distinctive qualities in his work. As a playwright he made many statements about what he was trying to do and what he thought literature and drama must do if they were to remain living arts, so that his work can be examined in the light of his own dramatic and critical principles. Yet he is regarded as a man of rather spontaneous genius — one who did not think of the theory behind his writing. O'Casey, himself, was partially responsible for this misconception. "I find it difficult," he wrote, "and have always done so, to talk or write about my work; what I have done, what I intend to do. I am what is called a shy fellow. . . ." But such a shyness is not obvious from his writing, especially his articles, where he clearly discusses his firm artistic beliefs. Robert Hogan writes:

I know of no other modern dramatist who has so cogently stated his position and charted his course . . . I do not want to puff O'Casey's theories up into more than they are, but those theories combined with the examples of the later plays are about the most intelligent and coherent reaction to the dreary plight of the contemporary theater. 5

O'Casey's conclusions about drama ignore form to assert the importance of spontaneity of expression. He does not believe in rules or patterns to be followed in order to create a drama, but rather that these rules must be broken and the



stereotyped patterns must go if playwriting was to remain a living art. This is all connected with his veneration of the word life and all its implications. Life above all, and life as opposed to the static death of realism, for his plays. According to O'Casey, principles of realistic drama ignored what life really was. He is not, therefore, concerned with keeping within the bounds of realism, but rather with the matter of the expression of the experience of life in all its diversity.

What are O'Casey's dramatic principles? In his prickly way he has pushed them forward in his lectures to his public (which a good deal of his writing, dramatic and otherwise, essentially is). Robert Hogan, in his book The Experiments of Sean O'Casey summed up O'Casey's dramatic opinions in six points:

- 1. The drama must be "full of life."
- 2. The drama must be experimental.
- 3. Dramatic realism is exhausted.
- 4. Anti-realistic genres and methods offer hope for the drama.
- 5. Within a play these anti-realistic genres may be juxtaposed with start-ling effectiveness.
- 6. This juxtaposition is the key to the structure of the experimental play.

The first three points are a valid basis for discussion of O'Casey's artistic principles, and will be discussed below along with one other aspect of his dramatic thought which it seems necessary to include that is the importance of imagi-



nation, sentiment, and opinion in an artist's work. The last three of Hogan's points and their irrelevance to O'Casey's total dramatic outlook, will also be discussed.

First, "The drama must be full of life". O'Casey always remains true to his word, life. That his autobiography will be full of it is obvious on the first page:

A CHILD IS BORN

In Dublin, sometime in the early 'eighties, on the last day of the month of March, a mother in child-pain clenched her teeth, dug her knees home into the bed, sweated and panted and grunted, became a tense living mass of agony and effort, groaned and pressed and groaned and pressed and pressed a little boy out of her womb into a world where white horses and black horses and brown-and-white horses trotted tap-tap-tap-tap-tap-tappety-tap over cobble stones, conceitedly, in front of landau, brougham, or vis-a-vis; lumberingly in front of a tramcar; pantingly and patiently in front of a laden lorry, dray, or float; and gaily in front of the merry and irresponsible jaunting-car.

Of course, when O'Casey states that drama must be full of life, it is because to him, life and drama are almost synony-mous:

The people are the theatre. Nature sets the scene and man plays his part through the changing scenes of seed-time and harvest, in the cold days when the frost comes and the keen winds blow. It is from the things manifested in the people's life - their love, joy, hatred, malice, envy, generosity, passion, courage, and fear - that the truest play-wrights weave their sombre and gay patterns of action and dialogue. Every art is rooted in the life of the people - what they see, do, how they hear, all they touch and taste; how they live, love, and go to the grave. The question for all



artists is this: Is the colour and form of what has been taken from their life done well or done badly?

Thus, O'Casey always attempts to portray life, and by doing so, give his plays vitality. Replying to critic Mason Brown who charged that O'Casey did not manage to make his purpose clear in <u>Within the Gates</u>, O'Casey quickly and characteristically suggests that Mason Brown, through his own lack of perception, has missed the point of the play. O'Casey writes:

Even in the printed page, says he, the play [Within the Gates] is a confusing affair in which the author has failed to make his purpose clear. Make his purpose clear! Considering that the play tried to make itself a microcosm of life as we live it today, it is not surprising that the play's purpose isn't quite clear to every eye that saw it, for the simple reason that life isn't quite so clear a theme as Mr. Mason Brown evidently thinks it to be.9

That he felt the writers around him (not to mention the critics) were nurtured on something less vital than his prescription of 'life' is obvious in O'Casey's satire entitled "Saint-Beauve, Patron of Poor Playwriters, Pray for Us!"

The Little Playwriters lived in the City of Dewymondroit. They were fed on dewberry dust and doughnuts specially made for them by the tribe of Criticonians who acted as their guardians in the daytime, and as their nurses at night. The Little Playwriters lived in dainty houses of spun-glass, and when the sun shone these spun-glass houses were radiant with many colours so that each Little Playwriter looked like a little lizard encased deep in a diamond. . . . And these spun-glass houses were air-tight, for air when it entered overcame these Little Playwriters, so that they died. 10



If the drama was to be "full of life" then it made sense to O'Casey that the drama should include all aspects of life — in other words, it should not be ordered around one emotion or one aspect of life only, such as tragedy, or depression, or boredom. O'Casey argues (like Keats in the "Ode to Melancholy") that the deepest sadness is found in the midst of joy, so that expression of tragedy without the light of comedy is lifeless and unnatural to a universal law. The best dramatists know this, but the majority of modern dramatists, O'Casey is convinced, have lost this understanding completely.

It is argued that Camus, Genet, Kafka, and such writers 'give us the ugliness of life to raise us to higher stages of moral insight and to more genuine emotions of gaiety and joy. Oh, they do, do they? They seem not only to try, but to struggle to make ugliness uglier than ugliness really is in They seem to believe that if they life. pull the gay-colored wings from a butterfly, it will look lovelier and fly higher. No one could be more bitter and sadder at times than the great Strindberg, but there was always deep compassion in his poetic plays and the gentle gong of hope was always sounding. There is nothing in the works of those drearier writers like the huge haunch of beef that Rembrandt painted with glowing color and elegant form, or the sight of the bud on the roof of Strindberg's gloomy castle, Strindberg's flaming dismal castle opening into a gigantic chrysanthemum flower. 11

Life always includes both comedy and tragedy. As for blending the two in a play, O'Casey writes:

^{. . .} indeed, life is always doing it, doing it, doing it. Even where one lies dead, laughter is often heard in the next room. There's no



tragedy that isn't tinged with humour, no comedy that hasn't its share of trage - if one has eyes to see, ears to hear.

Accordingly, O'Casey refuses to be daunted by the most tragic aspects of life, or to be trapped in a monotonous vision of depression. When he states that drama must be "full of life" he is also stating his optimistic opinion that all life is worthwhile drama. Suggesting the abundance of drama in man's world. he wrote:

It is a big, wide wonderful world of treasures for the young dramatist from which to pull beads of glittering glass or gems of the first water from its drab or colourful and intense tapestry of life. 13

The second point of Robert Hogan is O'Casey's firm conviction that the drama must be experimental. Just as any living thing is never static, but must grow and change, so must drama be willing to grow, to experience change, to reach out for development. "There is no doom in change", wrote O'Casey, "except for those who refuse, or who cannot accept the change. . . . A change invariably brings a profit, never a doom." Personally, he insisted on being a man open and flexible to change, and was so until the moment of his death. Not to change, not to run ahead of the winds of progress, meant that eventually one would be destroyed by change, "those", he said, "like Stoke and Poges who tried to live in the past till the present overthrew them." 15



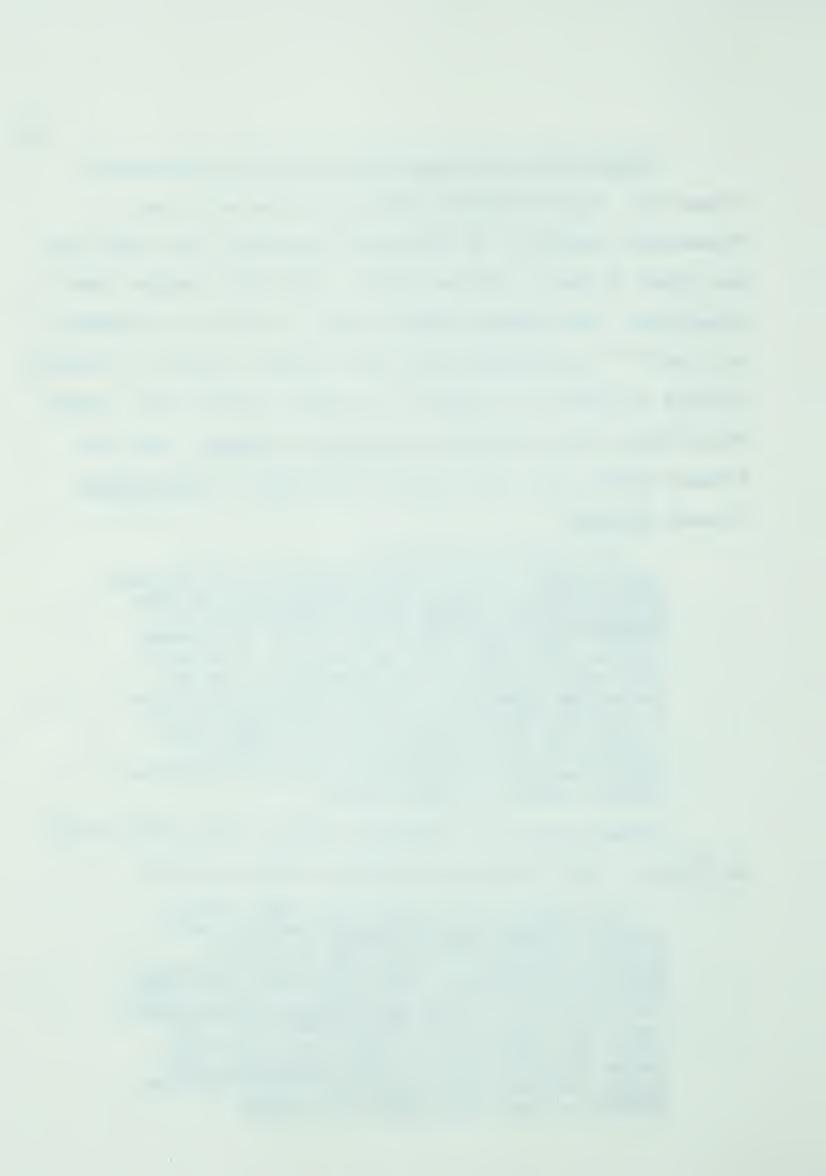
O'Casey did not hedge about being an experimental dramatist. His statements along this line are clear:
"Dramatists cannot go on imitating themselves, and when they get tired of that, imitate others. They must change, must experiment, must develop their power, or try to, if drama is to live."

Consistent with this, O'Casey refused to imitate himself as much as he refused to imitate anyone else. When Mason Brown, in an article on Within the Gates, asked why O'Casey didn't just write plays like Juno and The Plough, O'Casey replied:

Mr. Brown's declaration - for it is a declaration - that O'Casey should go on writing plays similar to Juno and the Paycock and The Plough and the Stars, shows that Mr. Brown doesn't know much about the art of the drama, or any other art, for that matter. For here the critic implores the dramatist to go on imitating himself, and that would be as bad as to imitate another. Directly derivative art is not art at all, and, though I might give another night's enjoyment to Mr. Brown, I think too much of the drama to go on imitating myself simply to please him. 17

O'Casey goes on to emphasize that to turn back would be futile. Still referring to Mason Brown, he says:

He tells us the other day, when reviewing The Plough and the Stars, that it seems hardly possible that the same man wrote Within the Gates, and The Plough and the Stars. Well, he's right here, for once in his lifetime, for the man who wrote The Plough and the Stars isn't the same man now as he was then. But while the man as he is today could possibly write another play like The Plough and the Stars, the man as he then was, could not have written a play like Within the Gates.



Mason Brown evidently wants me to be the same yesterday, today, and forever, but I have no desire to claim that distinction. Mr. Brown writes as if he bould, but it isn't a sign of progress. 18

As for what O'Casey thought of the critics who criticized his style for its innovations, its differences, we return again to Dewymondroit.

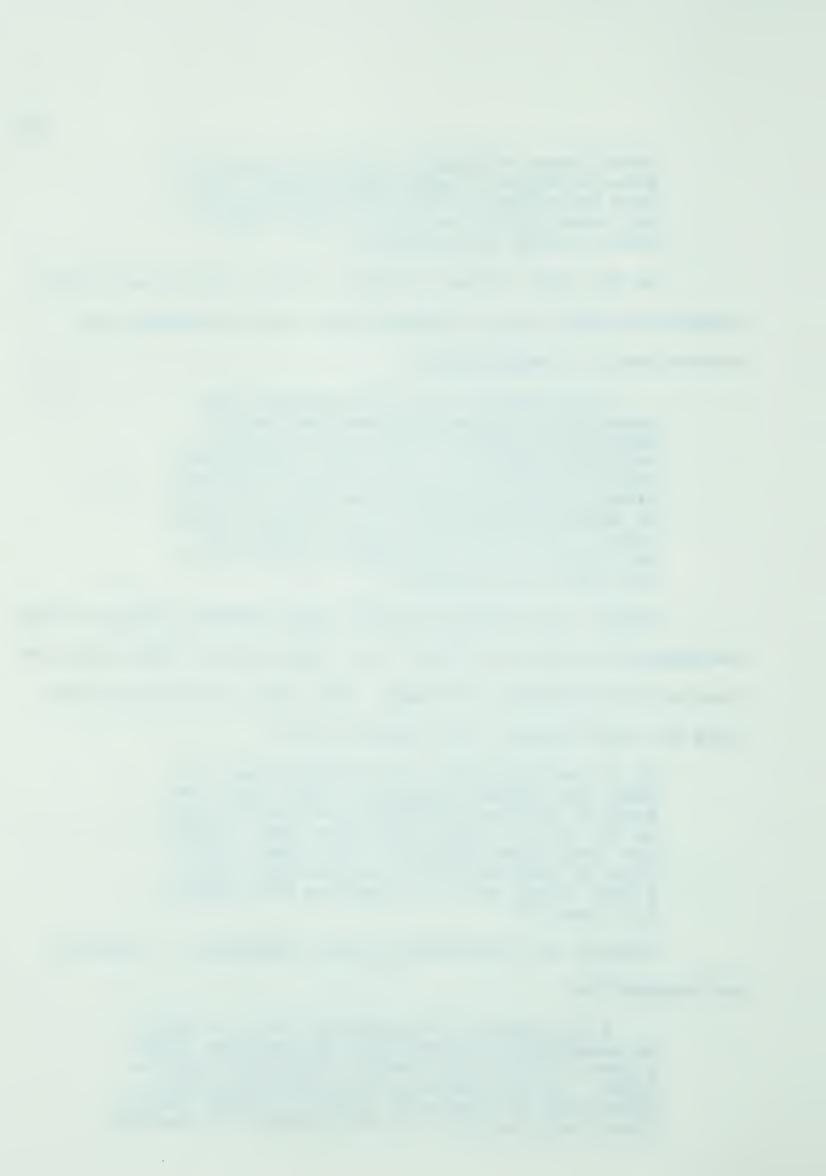
The Headman of the Criticonians was named Agatio Sagacious, who went about dressed in robes of black and white as a constant reminder to the Poor Playwriters that everything they wrote about must be either in black or white so that it might be easily understood of the simple people, and so that the Criticonians themselves shouldn't be brain-wrecked trying to make out what it all meant. 19

Third, is O'Casey's opinion that dramatic realism (and naturalism) is dead, and that its continuation would mean the loss of the relevance of drama. The death of realism meant life for the theatre, and O'Casey wrote:

It is exhilarating, in a perverse way, to hear that Ibsen's stealthy entry into the English theatre and Shaw's determined rush on its stage killed the drama dead, though the dead drama refused to lie down. The fact is that these two dramatists brought a dead drama back to a serious and singing life again. 20

O'Casey also provided his own definition of realism and naturalism:

A lot think that anything fiery, fierce, or commonplace is realism, but realism is but a form of writing in which imagination has no place. It is a setting down of things and characters as they are, without change, selection, modification, or arrangement. Naturalism



is that style in which man is arrayed against forces stronger than himself, completely beyond his control, and the characters are invariably set down on the animal plane. Meredith said somewhere of this kind of writer, the sees the hog in nature, and takes nature for the hog. 121

The continuation of this style of drama meant a loss for the theatre as a whole. To O'Casey, dramatists needed to develop beyond this style of realism, for realism itself was not enough: "If we are to confine the drama to sober and exact imitation of life," he pointed out, "then the drama is dead, for life itself is much more interesting than its sober and actual imitation. What realists take for life is but a faintly warmed-up corpse." 22

In fact, realism's attempt to be 'real' has broken the relationship between life and drama.

This desire for real life on stage has taken all the life out of the drama. The beauty and fire and poetry of drama have perished in a storm of fake realisms. Let real birds fly through the air, real animals roam the jungle, real fish swim the sea, but let us have art in the theatre. 23

In order to achieve this, dramatists must not be afraid to express themselves imaginatively.

Gay, farcical, comic or tragical, it must be, not the commonplace portrayal of the events in the life of this man or that woman, but a commentary of life itself. That is the thing to be done if the drama of today is to be in the mainstream of the great drama of the past. To achieve this the veneration of realism or, as Archer called it, pure imitation must cease, and imagination be crowned queen of the drama again. 24



Note that he feels drama should be "in the mainstream of the past". O'Casey believed that artists must learn from the best that has gone before them. "We must take the most of the best that has already been written for the theatre", he stated, "so that we may see the art of the dramatist in action, and try to learn from it."²⁵

The new drama will be a blend of the qualities of past drama, with a "breath of life" given them: "The newer form of drama will take qualities found in classical, romantic, and expressionistic plays, will blend them together, breathe the breath of life into the new form and create a new drama." 26

The next three points which Robert Hogan has extracted from Sean O'Casey's dramatic opinions that "Anti-realistic genres and methods offer hope for the drama", that "Within a play these anti-realistic genres may be juxtaposed with startling effectiveness", and that "This juxtaposition is the key to the structure of the experimental play", are only aspects of O'Casey's dislike of the rules of realism. But even as such, they are not necessarily valid.

O'Casey did not turn from one set of strict rules in order to turn to others, which is what these three points seem to suggest. He once wrote: "Don't know what Catastasis, etc. mean. Never met them. 'The golden rule' said Shaw, 'is that there is no rule.' Amen, say I."²⁷ What was important to O'Casey was what he had to say, and this remains much the



same from the first play to the last. He persisted in finding new and better ways to express himself, however, so that his style developed not in rebellion, but in fulfillment. When he says he "broke away from realism" he says nothing about turning to anti-realism. He turns to his own mode of expression. O'Casey only made his points against realism in defense of plays he had already written, plays which were under critical attack for departing so drastically from a conventional style. In order to clear breathing space for his style,
O'Casey tried to point out that every drama need not be realistic. Had he been concerned with convention, it is likely he would have remained comfortably within the bounds of realism.

In the following quotation, as in all his statements about artistic endeavor, he does not state the <u>method</u> that should be used to achieve great drama, he simply emphasizes what great drama should have. It is a fairly comprehensive statement of O'Casey's aspirations for the drama.

The first thing I try to do is make a play live: live as a part of life, and live in its own right as a work of drama. Every character, every life, however minor, to have something to say, comic or serious, and to say it well. Not an easy thing to do. These are the commonest things around us. We see them everywhere we go; see what they do, hear what they say; often laugh, sometimes wonder. But there are other parts, phases of life, and these, to my mind, should be prominent in a play. Above all, there is the imagination of man and that of the playwright; the comic, the



serious and the poetical imagination; and, to my mind, these too should flash from any play worthy of an appearance on a stage; the comic imagination as in The Frogs; the sad imagination as in The Dream Play. Blake thought imagination to be the soul; Shaw thought it to be the Holy Ghost, and, perhaps, they weren't far out; for it is the most beautiful part of life whether it be on its knees in prayer or gallivanting about with a girl.

To me what is called naturalism, or even realism, isn't enough. They usually show life at its meanest and commonest, as if life never had time for a dance, a laugh, or a song. I always thought that life had a lot of time for these things, for each was a part of life itself; and so I broke away from realism into the chant of the second act of The Silver Tassie. 28

One other area of O'Casey's dramatic principles remains to be discussed. It is the amount of personality, or personal characteristics, an author may reveal in his work. This means, to use three words O'Casey likes, the amount of imagination, sentiment and opinion in a work of art. Each of these was important to him.

First, the drama must have imagination. This is the mysterious ingredient O'Casey felt was necessary if a play was to be an excellent one. Plays without imagination were doomed to quick extinction, or would be relegated to the backwater of drama. His belief in imagination is obvious from the above quotation, and from countless others throughout his work. To some extent, his emphasis upon imagination arose from the lack of it in modern drama. In <u>Under a Colored Cap</u>, in an



article titled "The People and the Theatre", he writes:

Dramatic originality and poetic fancy will always be rare, but surely they shouldn't be quite so rare as they are in the present-day theatre; nor should the critics be allowed to frighten, or laugh, the people away from them. 29

He supported the dramatic importance of sentiment and feeling in the same way and was angry at those who felt themselves too sophisticated to watch a play touched with emotion. Resentful towards blase audiences who cringed at a joyous dance, or song, or a sad tear, he wrote:

It is curious how many folks, pridefull of the knowledge of the world and of modern literature, mock at a trembling tear or a sad emotion in a human eye. Anything in a play, a picture, a song, that tends to start a tear gives a hasty curl of scorn to the mocking mouth of the know-all. There is deep and deadening hatred, often a malicious contempt, for the 'Sob-stuff'. A sigh heard, a tear discovered on a cheek, fills the critical air with jeers, hoots and resentful laughter. . . . 30

He maintains that feeling is absolutely as necessary to drama as it is to life, and a play lacking the courage to express emotion is lacking something essential to drama:

Feeling can be banished from play and poem, but it can never be banished out of life. It begins when a new-born child first nuzzles into the breast of its mother, and it goes on in that life till the time comes when it is transferred to another closing the eyes of the dead, once the new-born babe. We would be curious, cold beings without feelings and a poem or play without them is just as strange and more than cold.31



After all, he writes: "Even the vegetable world feels in its own way; they shrink from physical cold and expand to the heat; they feel any rupture to their form, a broken stem, a hacked-off branch." Men also feel in this way:

So we, too, feel physical shocks, sudden cold or sudden heat, the wound from an operation or an accident; but the definition of the physical feeling is as inexpressible as those of the abstract ones from love or from hope. So since we can't take this feeling away, this emotion that is common to all things - even to those who taboo them - to banish it from poem or play is to banish it, not from life, but to banish life from the poem and the play. 32

Modern theatre, O'Casey observes, has sterilized itself to a deadness never before found in drama. It is time for improvement.

Drama is tired of the neat and trimly dressed plays that live their little day on the stage, stretch out their little hands for admiration and then sigh themselves down to the dead; plays that sprinkle us with scent instead of purging us with hyssop; that enthrone the sex force on a satin-sheeted bed in a room from which never issues the chant of unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; plays whose high moments are movements with big bottles of champagne and little glasses of sherry; whose horizon of life is the regular ledges of a cocktail bar; whose ingenuity of technique consists of inventing obvious and common-place excuses to get one character off the stage and bring another one in; plays in which the acting has become so refined that it has ceased to be acting at all; plays that have been dead a hundred years before they have been written. Poetry, passion, song, rhythm; rhetoric; exaggeration of emotion and gesture have been gutted out of the socalled modern drama; it has been purified out



of existence. The wedding garments are shown to us, but the bride and bridegroom have been driven away. Prohibition has laid its heavy, fat and ugly hand on the drama; she has been made sober by the law of technique, and will never come to her senses till she takes to drink again. 33

The dramatist's imagination must flash through his plays; the sentiment he sees around him has a place too.

What about his opinions? O'Casey was aware of the difficulty of incorporating opinions in plays, yet felt they too had a place in drama. He became just as angry with people who were convinced that the opinions of the artist should be far from his work of art as he was with those who were afraid of emotion, and he writes:

Opinions in plays are damned spots - so say the proud and the haughty. At any play venturing to give an opinion about certain aspects of social life, if this opinion has a jewel of rebuke for one thing, a jewel of praise for another, they hang their heads with shame, or point fingers of scorn at the playwright. They squirm in their seats and in their walk all the way home should they get a hint of a 'message' in a play, which is an opinion that unhappily cuts through an opinion of their own about what is art, what is literature. Opinions have nothing to do with either, only with life. One is the kingdom of the stars, the other with the world of goosy-gander. 34

These principles are the creative basis of O'Casey's prose, poetry and drama and they will be clearly seen as the artistic motives which designed the autobiographies. The six books have life, not only as a subject, but "life", O'Casey's criterion for artistic vitality. They obviously depart from



any usual kind of form, fulfilling O'Casey's criterion that "The drama must be experimental." Justification for this experimental style was provided by the third point, "Dramatic realism is exhausted." And clearly too, imagination, sentiment, and opinion are important to the autobiography.

In fact, the man, the life, and the literary style are completely integrated, and one of them cannot be discussed while the others are excluded. O'Casey is like his own metaphor about the jewel turned in the hand, for he shows "more than many flashes of diversity in the unity of [his] many—sided nature". 35



CHAPTER II

THE DRAMATIC STRUCTURE OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

In the NOVEL, the SHORT STORY, and the DRAMA, the structure is generally regarded today as the most reliable as well as the most revealing key to the meaning of the work. In the contemporary criticism of poetry, too, structure is used to define not only verse form and formal arrangement but also the sequence of IMAGES and ideas which unite to convey the meaning of the poem.

"Structure" is indeed a revealing key to the meaning of Sean O'Casey's work. And, as the above quotation states, structure need not define only "verse and formal arrangement" but it can also define "the sequence of IMAGES and ideas which unite to convey the meaning" not merely of the poem, as the quotation insists, but in O'Casey's case, of his plays and autobiographies. And so it is clear immediately that O'Casey's structure departs from the usual, for the suggestion of a meaningful structure for poetry applies to O'Casey's prose as well.

In order to comprehensively examine the structure of O'Casey's autobiographies it will be considered from four aspects: the physical arrangement of the books, their literary form, the framework provided by the subject and the themes,



and the technique, which also provides a framework for the books, but is important enough (and unique enough) to merit a chapter of its own, Chapter III.

First, the physical arrangement of the autobiography is, of course, one life, divided into six separate books, with an irregular number of years of the life included in each. The volumes are divided into from fourteen to twenty—three chapters, each chapter composed of numerous incidents. Or, if explained dramatically, the story of Sean O'Casey's life is portrayed in six acts, each act with a number of scenes, and each scene composed of separate incidents in the life. If the autobiography were presented as a drama, intermissions would probably be held between the second and third act and the fourth and fifth, since the life conveniently falls into three stages: childhood and new experiences in volumes one and two; youth and political involvement in volumes three and four; and maturity accompanied by a literary life, and marriage, in volumes five and six.

Each title page has an introductory declaration, quotation, or comment, humorous or serious, such as:

You cannot prevent the birds of sadness from flying over your head, but you can prevent them building nests in your hair.

Chinese Proverb

I'm gonna wash 'em all outa my hair.2



In the original volumes there is always a full page picture facing the title page, which depicts some aspect of O'Casey's life, and on a clear page before the beginning of the first chapter in each book, there is a dedication, usually serious, to someone of importance to O'Casey. For example:

TO

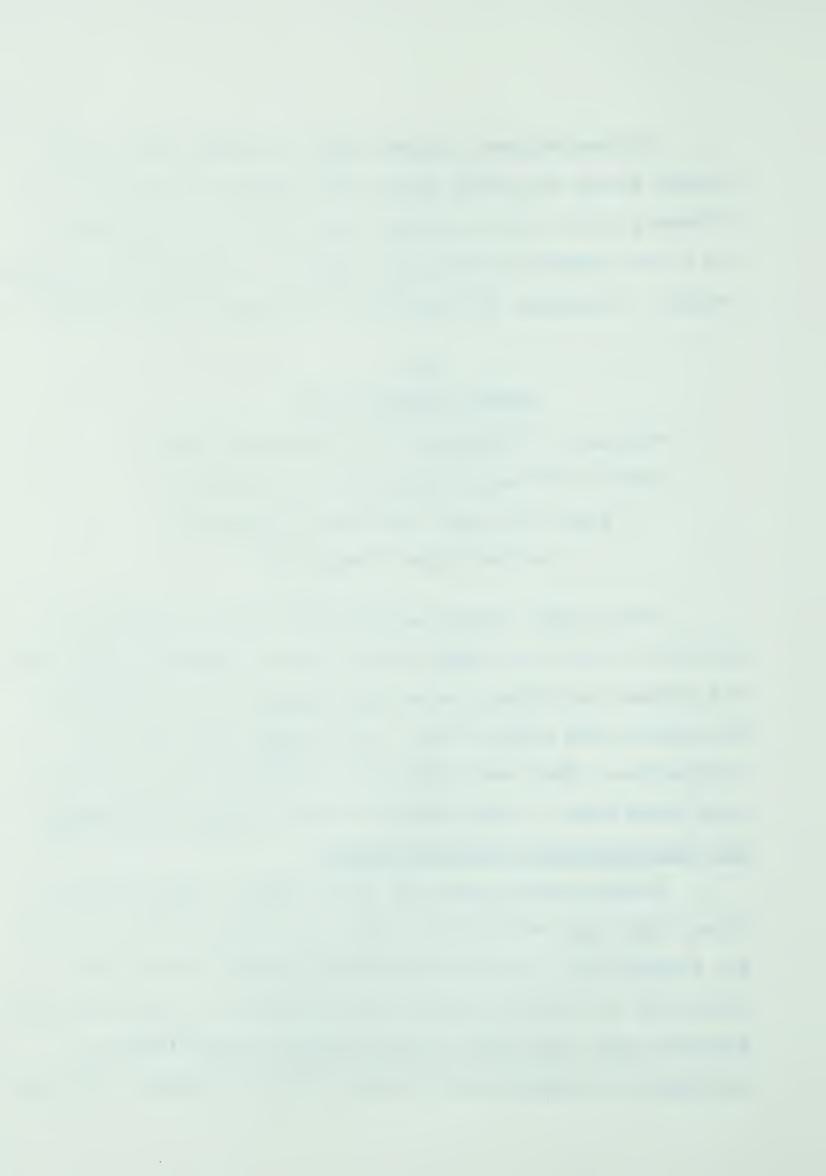
WALTER McDONALD, D.D.

Professor of Theology in St. Patrick's Roman Catholic College, Maynooth, for forty years; a great man gone, and almost forgotten:

but not quite forgotten.

These books include seventy-four years of O'Casey's life (he lived to be eighty-four), and he originally published the volumes separately, as he wrote them, one by one during the period from 1939 to 1954. He did not call them autobiographies. They have since been published in two volumes with three books in each under the title Mirror in My House, The Autobiographies of Sean O'Casey. 4

O'Casey relates what he calls "Swift Glances Back at Things That Made Me" in the style of a novel, with a persona for himself and a voice in the third person. He does not claim that the autobiographies are factual. We know from Sean McCann's book, The World of Sean O'Casey, that O'Casey did deliberately exaggerate the poverty of his childhood, that, as



his old girlfriend, Maire (Nora in the autobiographies) said, "His home was never a slum. In this way he was a bit two-faced. He liked to put on the Irishman's poor mouth." No matter what he does to distort the facts, however, he should not be charged with falsity, for the six books, although based on his own life, are also literary works and are presented as such. They are never strictly claimed to be factual autobiography. As a matter of fact, they were not even called autobiography until they were reprinted into two volumes in 1954. Not presented as literal truth, the volumes are not necessarily meant to be taken as such. Some facts are left out in order to heighten drama, and many characters are creations of fantasy for the same reason, as in the portrayal of an imaginary George Bernard Shaw debating with the Dublin statue of St. Lawrence O'Toole, come to life. Saros Cowasjee, a biographer of O'Casey's, once wrote him and chided him for failing to include some facts which Cowasjee thought were necessary to the autobiographies. particular fact in contention was that O'Casey did return to Ireland again after his self-imposed exile to England began, and yet he fails to mention this in the autobiography. O'Casey replied to this in a flat, factual tone, as though having to be factual annoyed him: "This is also a mistake. Came back to get books and papers. Stayed the night in a hotel opposite station for boat-train, and left first thing



in the morning." The state of the state of the facts, but rather had chosen not to include them in his volumes. Having the world on, O'Casey refuses to take its rules seriously. Playing with life, he has the last laugh, for the literary form of his autobiography is elusive under attack.

There are several obvious advantages to the reader as well as the artist which result from this form, as a comparison of the O'Casey biography with an autobiography of firstperson recollection makes clear. Yeats' Autobiographies are a good example for comparison, for they are the recollections of an Irishman who was a contemporary and an associate of O'Casey's and they are written in the first person. The first thing that is clear about the form of Yeats' Autobiographies is that the perceptive viewpoint is limited to one man: the writer. Since we, as readers, perceive only through his mind and senses, the point of view is narrowed to the view through his mind and senses; narrowed to the view through his eyes. We catch little sight of Yeats, but instead, see what he sees, and even narrower, what he sees in memory. It becomes a book of impressions and thoughts about other people, all given in the opinionated tone of an egocentric author.

O'Casey has attempted a different kind of portrait.

Writing in the third person and using himself as a character,
he presents not only his perception of the world, but also



what he imagines is the world's perception of him. As a character, he develops full dimensions, while he is still able, as author, to record his impressions through that character. There is less musing and less 'recollecting of experience in tranquillity', because the character can be revealed and the story unfolded only by the interaction of the O'Casey persona with other characters. The audience, instead of listening in on old-age recollections becomes an onlooking participator in the unfolding action, as it does in attendance at a play. He is also allowed expression through the voice of more than one character, and from more than one viewpoint. He is not limited to speaking only through his persona and the author of the book. And because his consciousness as author and the consciousness of the main character are mixed, it is not such a glaring interruption when Sean turns, as he eventually does, and addresses his audience directly.

Thus, O'Casey's presence in the volumes is as elusive as it is pervasive. The reader discovers that one persona merges into another, and that O'Casey appears in a variety of roles throughout his books.

He begins the volumes, not in the persona of Johnny, but as an omniscient narrator: with vivid intensity he portrays the writhing struggle of his birth, his mother's twisting agony, and the world into which he was being forced.



As omniscient narrator, he can enter the consciousness of whichever character he chooses, and the reader can suddenly find himself in the mind of a character who shares Johnny's world. It may be a mythical character, brought to life in the unique O'Casey way, or it may be another human being with whom he interacts. These passages, often a chanting interior monologue, are some of the most striking in the volumes. For instance, in order to quote a passage in which O'Casey expresses the thoughts of his sister on the night before her wedding, it is necessary to break into a nine-page continuous chanting sentence, and perform the difficult task of choosing one part above another. We break in on her thoughts:

. . . from now on I'll have to be settin' these things aside to concentrate on things far more important that Gladstones an' Gordons who are here today an' gone tomorrow where the good niggers go, so put up de shovel an' de hoe for there's no more work for poor uncle Ned for he's gone where de good niggers go, and the rest is silence as Shakespeare says, so it behoves your humble servant to tamper only with the change tomorrow's bound to bring about in the things I think an' the things I do from that day forth so help me God, to measure how I'm goin! to live on what I get an' what I give outa what I get while he's in the army for the next year or more before his twelve years with the colours are up an' he gets his deferred pay of twenty-one pounds to give us a start off, with his regimental pay an' hair-cuttin' allowance amountin' to not more than fifteen shillin's a week all told, it'll be a tough job to keep goin' without even allowin' for common emergencies that are sure to crop up while he's there an' I'm here waitin' for tomorrow's darkness



when a girl that never lifted her clothes an inch above her ankles'll have to take them all off an' give everything she holds dear to the man of her choice in spite of me mother for ever pickin' at me because poor Nicholas isn't anything higher than a drummer, as if rank mattered in any way to a true-hearted an' pure girl who truly loved a man . . .

Apart from this omniscient position, we soon discover that the author also has a position inside young Johnny, the central character. We listen to his thoughts, experience his battles and feel his pain, experiencing the Dublin before the turn of the last century through his eyes. This consciousness, or persona, is directly involved in the life of the book and in the impressions recorded. It is the persona that is the basis for the books.

As the volumes progress, however, the strain of using the omniscient position and the third person persona begins to tell on O'Casey, and he gradually slips into a more direct role: that of Sean the author speaking directly to his audience. We no longer watch, we listen. Sean lectures:

One of the reasons, says Bernard Shaw, why the Abbey didn't do my play was because it wasn't congenial to the whole spirit of the neo-Keltic Movement, bent on making a new Ireland out of its own idea, while my play was an uncompromising presentment of the real old Ireland. 9

This second Sean develops most significantly in the last volumes but begins in <u>Drums Under the Windows</u>, the third book. And at the end of the last volumes, <u>Sunset and Evening</u>



Star, Sean the author and Sean the persona become even more indistinguishable as the end of the last book reaches the present time, and literary character and real life approach one another under the evening star.

There is a third Sean in the books. This is the Sean that the audience senses as standing beside them, onlooking and watching his life again as he re-creates it. This may be partly a result of his habit of slipping in small commentaries in his own voice, but it may also result from the feeling that the author of a play must watch the performance just as the audience does. O'Casey was aware of this. acting to a critic's statement that a play has nothing to do with an audience, O'Casey moaned: "But everyone outside of himself is an audience, and when he reads a play he's written. he plays audience to his own work in his own way."10 are times when O'Casey is blatant about being his own spectator. For example, when he and a crowd of Gaelic Leaguers see Dr. Douglas Hyde off to America, he describes their advance to the railway station as directly as if he were relating it to a friend in a pub:

On we all went slow along the mean-looking flanks of Anna Livia Plurabelle singing songs of Eireby by the dozen that would rouse up even the stone outside Dan Murphy's door. But when we came to the station, lo and behold, there was a crowd of police barring the way in to the station platform. Were we down-hearted?



This variety of persona can somewhat confuse the audience. So can O'Casey's variety of technique and genre, which will be discussed more completely in Chapter III. He uses, in both his dramas and the autobiography, the narrative form, the dramatic form, the lyric and epic form, the article, the song, the chant, the monologue. Upon the basic technique of the literary novel, he imposes his own montage, his peculiarly O'Casey mixture.

Accustomed to drama of a less startling nature, his audience often reacted with surprise, shook, and sometimes anger when faced with his persistent dramatic pursuit of what to them seemed confusion. Even actors were confused, as were those at the Abbey Theatre the first time June and the Paycock was produced. Gabriel Fallon, in his reminiscences about O'Casey, describes the reaction of the actors:

We could make nothing of the reading of Juno and the Paycock as it was called. It seemed to be a strange baffling mixture of comedy and tragedy; and none of us could say, with any certainty, whether or not it would stand up on the stage. Sara Allgood had some difficulty reading her script several times she referred to "Joxer Daly" as "Boxer Daly" and had to be corrected for it. Barry Fitzgerald mumbled his way through the part of Captain Boyle and gave not the slightest indication that it was likely to be funny. F.J. McCormick applied his well-known Dublin technique to the part of Joxer yet nothing much worthwhile seemed to be emerging from it. All were agreed that the title of the play was not a good one, and that the dialogue written for the part of Jerry Devine, which was to be



played by that manly forthright actor P.J. Crolan, was possibly the most stilted ever written in the history of the Abbey Theatre. There was a general feeling that the play lacked form, that it was much too "bitty", that the mixture of tragedy and comedy "would not go" and that the author of The Gunman might well have overshot his mark. 12

However, formlessness, or at least, a certain looseness of structure, is an important structural technique of O'Casey's. This is a direct result of the importance he places on the artist's imagination, his vision. "Above all," he wrote, "there is the imagination of man and that of the playwright; the comic, the serious and the poetical imagination." And again: "Technique is useful and important, the marshalling of a play within a limited allowance of space and time; but imagination is all: it is the focus of all achievements by man." Accordingly, O'Casey's technique is used only to further this vision. It is the complete servant of his imagination, and thus it is a technique peculiar to him alone.

With the physical arrangement of the autobiography divided into six books, written over a number of years and published separately, and with the literary form that of a novel, expressed by a number of persona and montage of genres loosely (if dramatically) connected, the subject and themes of the books grow to significance as forces of unity between the six volumes.

It could have been expected that Sean O'Casey would



finally write a book about his life - for the word and its meaning for him was the basis not only of his artistic principles, but of his philosophy as well. Life and the right to live a good life is what he fights to vindicate from all those who would destroy this ideal. The word re-appears again and again in all of his writing. Any play that has any merit must have that prime ingredient - life - and in all of its aspects. Life is drama to O'Casey, so it is not strange that he should finally write the drama of his own life. In 1942, in an article called "Behind the Curtained World" he wrote:

If the drama dies in one place, it springs to life in another, for drama was the first child given to the first man and woman born to the world. Wherever two or three of them are gathered together. there is the theatre. Wherever we sit down, stand up, lie stretched: wherever we sing, dance, work, weep, curse and swear, or play games; wherever a child is born, or a man or woman die, there the theatre is, and ever will be. And now, wherever a soldier's camp is fixed, a gun goes off, or a bonny young airman flies upwards or crashes down to death; wherever a field is tilled, or machines rush round in a factory there is the stuff that drama and dreams are made As high as we can reach to heaven, as low down as we may get to hell, and all between, is the theatre proper and the theatre grand. 15

Although the last book is very different from the first of the six autobiographical volumes, the life of O'Casey remains, of course, as the subject not only of the autobiography,



and of each single volume, but also of the incidents making up each volume. Each book is unified by life, and the six books are unified by the development of that life. This means, of course, change and growth, so that each book, while portraying a certain stage of the life, is still a part of the whole development of the essential drama from youth to age. There are three pre-dominant developments of this life that stretch through all the biographies providing a framework of growth and development.

The first, obviously, is the growth of the persona of Johnny from that of a child to an old man, and the co-ordinating change in the style of his expressions. We begin with young Johnny and his quick, vital, run-on sentences, his hurried and super-imposed stream of images:

Two or three minutes more, and in came the Reverend Mr. Hunter who went up to a little table near the fire, warmed his hands for a few moments, and then turning to us all, says, Let us pray. There was a hurried sound of many moving as all knelt on the floor to listen to the wary hairy airy fairy dairy prayery of the bearded shepard the leopard the rix stix steppard. He prayed that all our eyes might open to see wonderful things coming out of God's law; that we might increase in that true religion only to be found in the Bible; and that these children here present might ask only for those things which would please God to give them. Lots of things I liked, lots of things I wanted, lots of things I longed for, little drops of water, little grains of sand made the mighty ocean and the mighty land.



When me eyes are well again I'll land one on Tait that he won't forget in a hurry. I'll crooken his jaw for him; they'll have to shut up the shop while they're plastering up the crack in his kisser, a crack that'll be big enough to climb in and look out again, thrust 'n parry like the South Wales Borderers in the battle of Isandlwana at the towerin' Zulus teemin' in on top of them. . . . 16

Taking the Gaelic name of Sean, Johnny, the young man, begins to organize his speculations and to shape his opinions. He stops listening to what the "establishment" tries to teach him. His sentences are more clearly organized, and tinged with bitterness. Gone is the wide-eyed wonder, the intrigue with which the child Johnny had explored his world, as Sean's voice grows in awareness:

Sean hoped no-one who knew him would come along this way, especially any Gaelic League friend or a Republican brother. Not that he cared a lot, of course, but it was just as well to keep a few things hidden from the sneaking world. And didn't he remember well good-natured Peadar O'Nuallain catching his arm one day, and drawing him aside to whisper - what d'ye think now? - nothing less than Why don't you wear a collar and tie, Sean, and not come to the Branch with a muffler round your neck? 17

The middle-aged O'Casey is concerned with issues, and enters a period in the books from Drums Under the Windows to nearly the end of the autobiography in which he expresses his arguments and berates his opposition. His emotions lead him to crusade. For instance, speaking of his hero, Dr. O'Hickey, who fought for the right to have Irish taught in the



university, and who was eventually broken in a legal battle with Irish Catholic clergy and Rome, O'Casey's veneration of the man (and his identification with him as a fellow-sufferer of an unjust world) forces him to speak emotionally and out of his persona, directly to his hero.

Here is one who remembers you, O'Hickey. Here is one who, when you died, had but a flitter of a coat on his back, who walked on the uppers of his boots, who hadn't the penny to buy the paper telling of your death; here is one left to say you were a ray in Ireland's Sword of Light - a ray then, and a ray still, and no episcopal pall can hide its flaming. Though there be none to speak out your name, here is one to utter it in the same breath, with the same pride as those who speak out the names of Ireland's fair and finest sons; for you are one with her they call Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan, though you have not been remembered forever; one with her as is yellow-haired Donough who's dead; who had a hempen rope for a neckcloth, and a white cloth on his head. 18

Finally, at the end of the last book, life and biography almost become one, and the Johnny-Sean persona mingles with that of the author writing in the present-tense, completing the strange trinity of basic personae in the books. What Sean writes is actually happening. The tone is reminiscent, the speeches angry, the challenge to life still there:

Even here, even now, when the sun had set and the evening star was chastely touching the bosom of the night, there were things to say, things to do. A drink first! What would he drink to - the past, the present, the future? To all of them! Here, with whitened hair, desires failing, strength ebbing out of him, with the sun



gone down, and with only the serenity and the calm waning of the evening star left to him, he drank to Life, to all it had been, to what it was, to what it would be. Hurrah: 19

Co-ordinating with this development of Sean from youth to age is the change in Sean's degree of involvement in actual experience. This was cleverly noted by Robert Hogan in regard to O'Casey's religious development. In Hogan's publications of O'Casey's early work titled Feathers from the Green Crow, he writes:

. . . the same pattern of growth can be seen in his religious thought that we have seen in the other causes which he espoused. First there was a passionate involvement; later his critical mind saw many flaws, sometimes outrageous ones, in the practice of religion, and ultimately he became an outspoken critic.

This pattern clearly reveals itself in the autobiography. At first, Sean is in the centre of suffering and poverty, and the experience is immediate. He has not yet begun to withdraw from it, but rather opens his childish eyes and looks at the world with the fascination of youth. His eyes are weak, yet he strains them in his eagerness to see all that occurs around him, and strains his mind to believe all the Irish political hopes and dreams. Like all of Ireland at the turn of the century and for twenty-five years afterwards, he was carried away by the romantic dream of Cinderella Ireland, the beautiful and suffering Cathleen ni Houlihan that needed total love, support, and vindication. He is swept up in the color, the



sound, the pageantry, the violence of the time. Consequently, the first volumes are rich in color, form and action. He is proud and excited about his part in the preparations for war with England, and especially about its romantic glamour. He swells with pride when he sees lusty Irish lads demonstrating their love of country, as when he watches a band of Irish patriots come swinging down the street:

Gradually, however, his mind begins to perceive flaws, to be faced with unpleasant reality, and he recognizes that the dreams of Ireland and of his youth are only that: dreams, dreams which cannot possibly succeed. The criticisms which his mature mind suggest and which he cannot ignore begin to alienate him from his fellow-dreamers, and he leaves the "mad dance" to enter his own separate world. Typically, for the uncompromising Sean, his withdrawal becomes total, and he leaves Ireland.

He was on the deck of the mail-boat, feeling her sway and shyly throb beneath his feet; watching the landing stage drift afar away, getting his last glimpse of Eireann - separated from her, and never likely to stand settled on her soil again. It was bitterly cold, with a fierce, keen wind blowing, and soon it was sending sharp sleety hail and salty spray into his face, stinging it



deeply - Ireland, spitting a last venomnous, contemptuous farewell to him.

Well, everything of any value he was carrying away with him: the moral courage and the critical faculties of his father, and his love of good books; the gay humour and the dogged resolution of his mother, and her love for, and understanding of, the bright colours among the dead, drab things 22

When he feels even his withdrawal threatened either by human stupidity in general or by the more specific threat represented by a critical attack, he enters the final stage: that of outspoken critic. Once in England, he lashes out in person, by letter, by article, and in the later books of the autobiographies, speaking directly to his "shadow-character", the audience.

It is at this point that the underlying themes of the books become clearer for at this last stage of "outspoken critic" the literary persona is dropped, and O'Casey speaks his opinions directly to his audience, revealing the organizing themes which pushed him to write.

By the time one reads the last book it is obvious that the emphasis and approach in the autobiography has changed, and O'Casey's original attempt to create again a colorful lively world from his own life fades into a recollection of the milestones only of the life. The events of his life and their actual setting now receive little mention or attention, and the strongest concern in the last books is with intellectual and literary controversies. Perhaps these have become



O'Casey's life: the fact remains that there is a drastic change in emphasis from life to literary battle, which brings about a decrease in dramatic impact. The books move from action on paper - from the voice of a young life (written as a novel) - to that of an old man (written as a literary dispute with the world).

This development would appear contradictory to a sense of unity since it causes such a change in style between the earlier and later books. Yet in a subtle way this development is a very cohesive force throughout the autobiography. O'Casey's basic philosophy never changes. That the style changes does not imply that the themes change. His growing appreciation of opinionative writing reflects his dramatic principle that opinions have a place in literature. An artist who attempted to purify his work until it was free of his cwn personal character was slighting himself and his work. In an article called "The Play of Ideas", O'Casey wrote:

So we cannot keep ideas about things out of plays. We'd have to get ideas out of life before we could remove them from the drama. Indeed the very first glimmer of the conception for a play is an idea. There's hardly a thing written as a play, a novel, or a poem, that hasn't an idea under it, hovering over it, or in its very core. Life is constantly pummelling 13 itself with ideas from morn till midnight.

Human life is filled with opinions, and art would be sterile if it were completely devoid of them. In fact, O'Casey



wonders if art would exist at all, without opinions.

Each of us has within our bodies as many opinions as there are cells - opinions of friends, enemies, politics, religions, food, dress, morals, or the latest rise or fall of Charlie Chaplin. 'A playwright has nothing to do with opinions', said W.B. Yeats vehemently in my bothered ear once, failing to realize himself that this very declaration was one of the oddest opinions among the multitude showered down on the world of man. Every play, published or performed, is the expression of an opinion, about something or other, things pleasant, or unpleasant, things felt or things seen, things foreshown; about the sun, moon, and stars; death, judgement, hell and heaven. Opinions have made the world we know, in which we live, and have our being; yet the elect and haughty ones say opinions have no place in a play. Didja ever hear the like 24

The importance of O'Casey's themes to the structure of the autobiographies is one important to drama in general:

This created world of the play, like all the worlds that man creates, has what our actual world so frequently seems to lack - an organizing principle that gives it meaning. The vitalizing principle that makes the play more than a mere copy of life is the playwright's vision - his ability, as T.S. Eliot once said of the powers of a poet, to see the skull beneath the skin, or go beneath the surfaces of things and see basic relationships and realities. This vision is not something the poet or playwright deliberately seeks or willfully shapes; it grows out of his total experience in his society and his world, and it reflects his total committment to an attitude towards life.

It is both the initiating spirit and the point of view from which he sees the events he records. 25



O'Casey's organizing principles, his vision, and initiating spirit all revolve about his primary concern with life as he sees it. This was his central theme and determined not only his dramatic principles but all philosophic convictions as well. This vision of life is an optimistic one.

O'Casey was continually antagonized by those who viewed life in a negative and unconstructive way, and he fought such pessimish continually, replacing it with his dogged expression of the positive and beautiful aspects of life. Commenting on Beckett's play Waiting for Godot O'Casey points out the difference between his vision and that of the younger playwright's:

That Beckett is a clever writer, and that he has written a rotting and remarkable play, there is no doubt; but his philosophy isn't my philosophy, for within him there is no hazard of hope; no desire for it; nothing in it but a lust for despair, and a crying of woe, not in a wilderness but in a garden. 26

Dandy O'Casey provides a very basic outline of his convictions, the 'right of the joy of life to live courageously in the hearts of men', and the necessary fight against those who move to thwart this right:

The play is symbolical in more ways than one. The action manifests itself in Ireland, the mouths that speak are Irish mouths; but the spirit is to be found in action everywhere: the fight made by many to drive the joy of life from the hearts of men; the fight against this fight to vindicate the right of the joy



of life to live courageously in the hearts of men. 27

The Cock in the play he describes as the principle of vitality, a "joyful active spirit" with which O'Casey strongly identifies:

The Cock in the play, of course, is the joyful, active spirit of life as it weaves a way through the Irish scene . . . So the Cock dances and crows, rousing up commotion among the young and the souls zealous for life, and consternation and hatred among those who demand denial, and the necessity to keep the mind well within the dark; rousing up controversy between the courageous and all who are afraid of others and equally afraid of themselves. In spite of the fanciful nature of the play, almost all the incidents are factual -- the priest that struck the blow, the rough fellows man-handling the young, gay girl, the bitter opposition to any sign of the strange ways of a man with a maid, the old menacing fool, full of false piety, going round inflicting fear of evil things on all who listen to him; and above all through the piety, through the fear, the neverending quest for money. In spite, too, of the fantasy and the fear, there is courage, reason, and laughter in the play, and I hope that with its shape and form, and all that is within them, those who see it may have a gay and a thoughtful time. So to end this explanation, I leave the play in the hands of actors, director, designer, and in yours, dear playgoers, turning my last words into a quotation from the poet Yeats:

> Lift up the head And clap the wings Red Cock, and crow! 28

O'Casey feels that modern writers have lost this principle of vitality, that their plays are no longer dealing with life but only with the discouraging aspects of it. These writers he



calls "a great galaxy of darkened stars, dulling the human sky". 29 In "The Lark in the Clear Air Still Sings" he writes:

The intelligensia in the western world have become weary of well-doing. They go about clogged with a sense of sin, and frown upon any inclination of the heart to sing. They have tried in novel, poem, and play to frighten hope from the human heart, but all find it hard to coax it away or to root it out, though, God help them, they do their best. To these writers hope springs infernal in the human breast, and they mock down any writer who ventures to guard and cherish it still: they don't like the lark's song. Present-day writers of poem, essay, play and novel, seem to set them down as they stand before a wailing wall. . . . They keep their eyes closed to show that man was born blind; they hold arm and leg limp as if the power of movement never reigned in either of them, but their mouths are never shut, but for ever wail out the warning given out by Shawn of the Glen that man has been worsted in the fight, and that life has taken a false turning and a false name.30

Obstinately refusing to entertain any notion that human life does not express beauty and yearn for it, O'Casey counters with: "Yet I've seen an infant hand held out towards a colored flower seen for the first time; I've seen the wonder in a child's eye who meets the sea for the first time; or who picks the daisies from the grass as a first treasure of beauty and of charm."31

Not content to merely believe in life O'Casey is determined to fight for his positive beliefs, and he often puts the heroes of his play in this position. For example, his description of what The Dreamer stands for in "Within the Gates"



shows his identification with his heroes:

'The Dreamer', symbol of a noble restlessness and discontent; of the stir in life that brings to birth new things and greater things than those that were before; of the power realizing that the urge of life is above the level of conventional morality; of ruthlessness to get near to the things that matter, and sanctify them with intelligence, energy, gracefulness and song; of rebellion against stupidity; and of the rising intelligence in man that will no longer stand, nor venerate, nor shelter those whom poverty of spirit has emptied of all that is worth while in life.32

This description of the Dreamer would also be a good description of the portrait of the Sean in the autobiography. The other characters in the play body forth other aspects of the O'Casey philosophy in more detail, symbolic of all the types he saw and disliked in life about him. "The Down and Out" come in for particular dislike:

'The Down and Out,' symbols of all who are dead to courage, fortitude, and the will to power; of those to whom a new thought or a new idea brings terror and dismay; of those who turn the struggle of life into a whine; of those, young or old, rich or poor, who in thought, word and deed, give nothing to life, and so are outcasts from life even as they live; even so.33

The autobiography is full of these people, and full too, of the positive spirit of Johnny-Sean, who expresses all the ideals O'Casey invested in the Cock of Cock-a-doodle-Dandy and the Dreamer of Within the Gates. The closeness of identity between the Sean persona and the heroes in these



plays indicates once again the close relationship between O'Casey's drama and his autobiographies.

The ideals these characters represent provide a thematic structure for both O'Casey's plays and books. This
structure, together with the development of the life, and
O'Casey's technique, is the cohesive force between the six
separate books of autobiography. His technique adequately
carries out and demonstrates O'Casey's structural concerns,
and remains to be discussed in the ensuing chapter.



CHAPTER III

DRAMATIC TECHNIQUE IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Despite O'Casey's constant belittling of the importance of technique, he was a master of it. It is a technique belonging to him alone, used to express his vision, and to a very large extent, is responsible for the success of his writing. He is not necessarily unique at such basic dramatic devices as setting and dramatic dialogue. His main success and innovations were connected with his attempt to make a play as he put it ". . . a pattern in words and movement either in poetry or prose, which must, if it is to be a fine work, bring to all who see and hear a new and exciting experience." If this pattern was to bring "a new and exciting experience" to an audience, then, he concluded, it must be a new pattern. His new pattern in words is reflected also in the scenes. Both express a rhythm - the choppy rhythm of juxtaposed chapters and episodes underlayed by the smoother rhythmic use of the words. All this, punctuated by the stacatto rhythm of his dash-dialogue makes his plays and books exactly what he hoped, "a pattern in words and movement either in poetry or in prose."

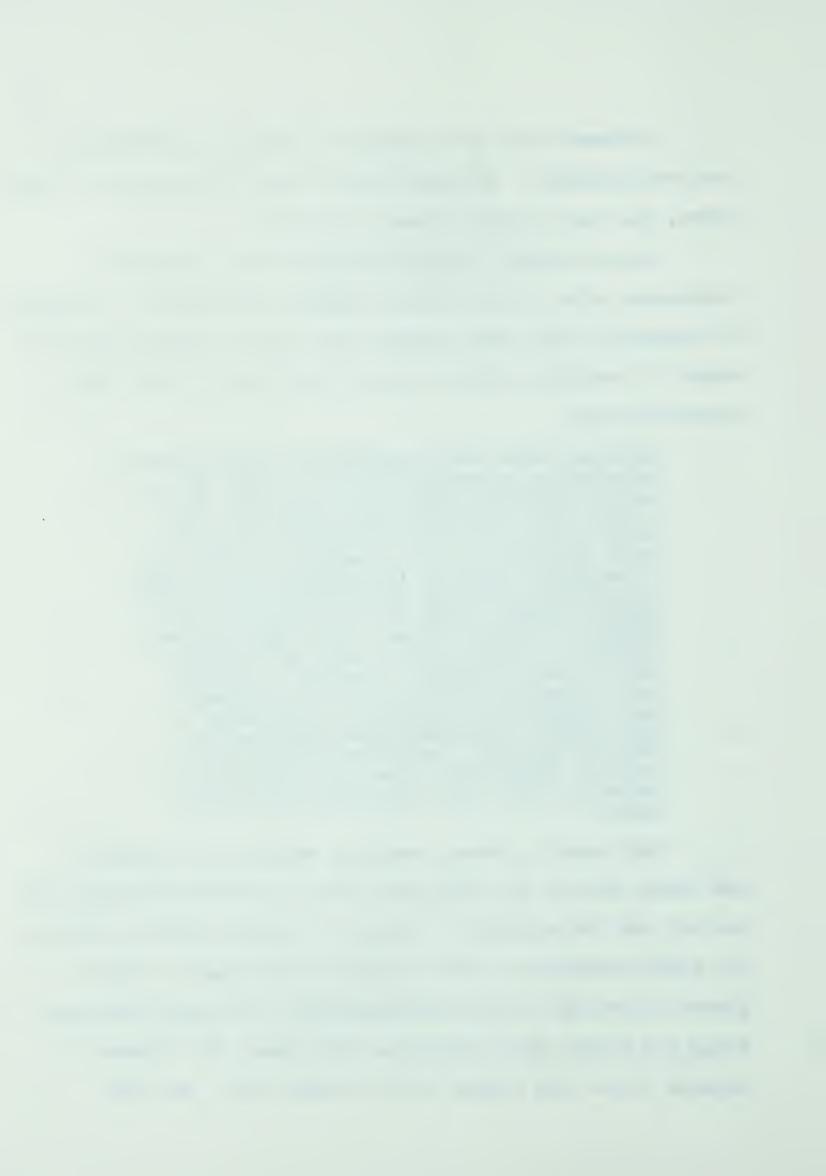


O'Casey's use of a dramatic technique is obvious in the autobiography. He uses both the basic necessities of the stage, and his own very dramatic pattern.

He was always careful to provide his scenes and characters with a most obvious dramatic necessity: a setting. For example, when young Johnny first goes to the doctor, the scene is carefully set to suggest the tension, fear, and pain of the boy.

Suddenly they found themselves in the doctors' room, and a nurse made them sit down on a special bench to wait for Mr. Story. It was a room full of frightening light, for the whole north wall was a window from side to side, and from floor to ceiling. There was a ceaseless sound of instruments being taken from trays and being put back again. Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, they went, and cold sweat formed on Johnny's brow. All round the wall terrible pictures of diseases of the eye and ear were hanging. A nurse, in a blue calico dress, with narrow white stripes, was hurrying here and there, attending to the doctors; and everywhere there was a feeling of quiet, broken by a man's groan, or by a child's cry, that made Johnny tense his body with resentment and resistance.~

The scene is drawn, auditory effects are suggested, the human prop of the efficient nurse is given directions for action, and the audience is told of Johnny's silent reaction, his first movement in this setting. This sense of background is strong in the autobiographies. Not only the settings for actual plot situations are given, but O'Casey is careful to set the scenes of his dreams, too. And the



setting of the six books, as a whole, is also important. Both Ireland and England are expressed through his pen. Young Johnny's trips through Dublin on shopping excursions with his mother are as inclusive in their depiction of Dublin as are the trips of young George in Tono Bungay through the streets of London. As we do with Pip in Great Expectations, so do we experience the settings and stratas of society through the experiences of Johnny.

If O'Casey's scenes are set dramatically, his dialogue is structured even more like that of a drama. He uses no quotation marks to indicate speech, and often does not introduce or distinguish a character each time he speaks, letting the tone of the voice and the content of the words distinguish characters one from another. Each new speaker is simply indicated by a dash before the beginning of his contribution. This helps the dialogue move faster and more naturally. David Krause calls O'Casey's method here "multiple-focus".

He also uses what might be called the multiple-focus of the drama for scenes which are almost entirely rendered through dialogue, and here he relies upon the projection of a series of dramatic voices . . . He will often create a whole situation the way it would appear in a play, and the characterization of the people is so complete in their speeches that little or no comment is necessary.



Interestingly, the O'Casey scenes follow almost the same dash pattern, for they follow one upon the other without introduction and sometimes without connection, like the patterned confusion of a kaleidoscope. According to O'Casey's reasoning, life was not a progressive and orderly development, so why should literature be? To really catch life, literature should also be a shuffle of impressions, scenes, experiences, feelings. Life is a thing to be played out and then allowed to pass from the stage, or as O'Casey puts it:

All that man can do is to make what man's life may be; to make what man's life must be; to ensure that life coming on to the stage when the curtain rises shall play his part out till the curtain falls. That is as much as we know; that is as far as we can go.

And that is the basic direction of progress in the biographies, the movement one can feel throughout the total shuffle of scenes. This formlessness was important to O'Casey: indeed, he once remarked that formlessness was a key to his plays, and, in an unsent letter to the <u>Irish Times</u> he wrote:

. . . and what is called "formlessness" may be a form in itself, as for instance, in J. Bull's Other Island, Chekov's plays, and Shaw's Heartbreak House. Life is like that at times. Few places can be so formless as Ireland at the present time. It is like a kaleidoscope, but giving - as a kaleidoscope - no settled or discernible pattern, however one may twist it, slow or with speed.

Kaleidoscope is an excellent word for Ireland and an excellent



word for the color, movement, and quick change of Sean's autobiography, with all its bright patterns and images contained within the imaginative expression of one life. O'Casey often used the metaphor of the kaleidoscope, not only in his articles, but in the autobiographies as well. In Drums Under the Window he titles one chapter "Dark Kaleidoscope" and twists the eyepiece again and again to focus on various dark and sombre scenes around him. This is the last twist of the eyepiece:

Twist the cap of the kaleidoscope, and see what it's like: a thick, black sky full of the pale dead faces of the workers, life but faintly sketched on each of them, like white, wan moons looking down on a broken purple star falling phutlong out of their own presunctified horrorizon.

This manner of viewing began early for Sean. The young Johnny, fascinated by the scenes of life before him, in the volume appropriately named <u>Pictures in the Hallway</u>, opens his eyes on one scene, closes them and then opens them on another scene:

Johnny closed his eyes and dozed, opened them again slowly; saw the wet grey dawn creeping in through the window, closed them on what he would see when the coffin [Parnell's] came to Ireland.7

I Knock at the Door, the first book of the autobiography, is sub-titled "Swift Glances Back At Things That Made Me".

These "swift glances" provide, helter-skelter though they may be, a visual rhythm for the autobiography, a feeling of



life and movement and drama. Robert Hogan suggests why audiences have difficulty in understanding (or liking) this structure: "The whirling beauty of a kaleidoscope is puzzling to an audience long conditioned to a succession of stills from a slide projector."

The dramatic stage is set. The characters are given dialogue. The scenes rush one after another in dramatic juxtaposition. Now, O'Casey's supporting techniques, the surrounding instruments in the dramatic orchestra, begin to Just as music cannot exist without a certain tension between bass and treble, so O'Casey's drama would not be effective without the tension his own personality gives it. Identifying strongly with what he believed to be the affirmative side of life, he is continually antagonized by a world he sees as pessimistic and destructive. The fact that he can neither win his conflict with the world nor accept it, gives the book an underlying tension which may be described as the frustration of the boy-man-elderly gentleman who cannot come to a peaceful understanding with his world and must withdraw to a tense alienation from it. This tension is reflected everywhere in the books and produces a symphony of tones and rhythms.

Contrast is a direct expression of this tension. There is contrast in character, color, setting, situation, as well as contrast between scenes and chapters. O'Casey's view



of life always includes the vision of death. Try as he might, Sean can see only a gay kaleidoscopic surface which flits in the face of the depth and the danger of the dark side of life. This darkness is never fully explored, so that whenever there is darkness in his books, there is light. We find this throughout the autobiographies. Perhaps one of the most intense and gripping episodes of contrast appears in the volume Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well, at the end of a chapter significantly titled "Comrades". Here a young man, Lanehin, is pursued by three men who were formerly his friends, but are now enemies because of political differences. The three men are all supporters of the Irish Free State government, and Lanehin has just tossed a bomb in one of the windows of their headquarters. The chase is fast and dramatic, evidence of O'Casey's ability with words, and when they finally catch up to Lanchin, and sit in an ominous circle around him, the reader is gripped in a tension of fear and expectation. just at the most agonizing point, we are suddenly slammed face to face with the creativeness of nature:

⁻ What are we going to do with you? echoed Colonel Clonervy. Bring you home, sit you on our knees, and nurse you? Would you like us to do that for you, eh?
- And let him sleep late in the morning, added one of the civilian-clad men.
- Make me a prisoner, murmured the unhappy lad, the hoarseness of fear darkening his voice; a prisoner of war - I surrendher.
- You asked us that before, said the Colonel; but it's easier said than done.



The house at home's too crowded to take another soul. What are you sweating for, man? Are you afraid of what's coming to you, or what? I thought all Republicans were above that sort of thing.

- I'm an old comrade of yours, Mick, the

young man pleaded.

- Sure I know that well, said the Colonel heartily, and I'll say this much - for the sake of oul! times, we won't let you suffer too long.

- Jesus! whimpered the half-dead lad, yous wouldn't shoot an old comrade, Mick! The Colonel's arm holding the gun shot forward suddenly, the muzzle of the gun, tilted slightly upwards, splitting the lad's lips and crashing through his chattering teeth.

- Be Jasus! We would, he said, and then

he pulled the trigger.

- Looka Ma! shrilled a childish voice behind Sean; looka what th' ducks is doin!! Sean turned swift to see a fair young mother, her sweet face reddening, grasp a little boy's arm, wheel him right round, saying as she pointed out over the innocent lake: Look at all the other ducks, dear, over there on the water!

dear, over there on the water!

The Drake had reached his goal, and he was quivering in the violent effort to fulfill God's commandment to multiply

and replenish the earth.9

This is the kind of contrast that makes the early O'Casey plays so dramatic: it is an orchestra-piece of deathly dark tones overlaced with dancing light ones.

Color expresses this contrast in a beautiful way.

Sean, when describing the drab and ugly rooms his family lived in, always remembers to describe the brightly colored geraniums and fuschia his mother grew in a pot in the window.

Color and the lack of it, light and shadow, lace the whole



of light and shadow as Johnny abandons himself to a dance in the street:

At a corner of a street, lower down, a hurdy-gurdy began to play a dance tune in a violet shadow. He [Johnny] stopped again by the river wall to listen. The player was robed with the sun as if for a religious festival. A young woman, dressed in a dark-red bodice and a blackand-white striped skirt, tapped her feet in the same violet pool and swung golden arms to the beat of the gay music. Then she began to dance. Johnny watched her. She laughingly beckoned to him with a golden hand. He flung off his coat, took a great red handkerchief from a pocket and bound it round his waist like a sash. He hurried over, beat time for a moment, got the swing of it, and then jumped into the hilarious dance of the young woman. At a little distance, a group, more soberly clad, for they stood in the deep shade of a huge building, here and there flecked with the red rays of the sun, stood and watched and quietly clapped their hands. The young woman caught Johnny's hand in her own, and the two of them whirled round in the bonny madness of a sun-dance, separating then so that she whirled into a violet shadow, while he danced into a golden pool, dancing there for a little, then changing places, he to be garbed in the hue of a purple shadow, and she to be robed in a golden light. 10

This almost becomes the light and shadow of life, for Johnny was just on his way home from a day of exhausting labor, his thoughts sombre, when he noticed the dancer. And the watching group "soberly clad, for they stood in the deep shade of a huge building", seems to be those people who are overpowered



by the necessity to conform, which is implied by the big buildings.

The tension of this double vision expresses itself also in the rhythm of the words. O'Casey's use of poetry, singing, chanting, and jeering, are all part of this tension, and echo the urgency of his feeling. They are worthy of examination, one by one.

First, being so very aware of the measure and sound of words, O'Casey's words at times begin to echo their sense. He repeats words of similar sounds, sometimes distorting their meaning in favor of the sounds, thus blending them in a rhythmical manner. For example, when he talks of Luther and the Reformation in a chapter "A Protestant Kid Thinks About the Reformation" in the first book of the autobiography, the words begin to echo their sense:

But the popes and priests opened into a full stride of opposition, and they argued with him and fought with him and persecuted him and tried in every way to double-cross and crucify him, but Luther stood firm to the shock in his smock like a rock and mocked them with many words

When we reach the line "but Luther stood firm" the beat becomes as heavy and firm as the meaning, with two unstressed words preceding the heavy beat of the short word of emphasis. These words are a part of the chant that underlies the whole chapter, and "Luther, at peace with God and himself, went on



The quicker beat of these words couples with the slower beat of re-statement. O'Casey will often divide a chapter into episodes of contrast simply by repeating a crucial statement of mood opposite to the one prevalent in the chapter. Thus, the flow of the reader's thoughts is abruptly halted and turned about face by a startling sentence which commands his immediate attention. In I Knock at the Door O'Casey relates the years of his father's life, recreating its vitality. But three times during the chapter the reader is suddenly and abruptly faced with the present predicament of his father, and the lurking death soon to take his life.

Up he came to Dublin, and married Susanna, who became the mother of his children, with Johnny as the shake of the bag. He was known to the neighbours for many years in his simple suit, half-tall hat, and blackthorn stick, bringing home his two pounds weekly, to his wife, like clockwork; liked by many, a little feared by all who know him, having a sometime gentle, sometime fierce habit of criticism; and famed by all as one who spat out his thoughts into the middle of a body's face. A scholar he was to all, who was forever poring over deep books, with a fine knowledge of Latin, and a



keen desire that others should love learning for its own sake, as he did.

And here he was now recling in a big horsehair-covered arm chair, shrinking from something that everyone thought of, but noone ever mentioned. 13

This last sentence punctuates the chapter and provides the undertone of death in the description of life.

O'Casey's appreciation of rhythm reveals itself also in his appreciation of words moving to more strictly regulated time - the words of songs, chants, and ditties sung by various characters in spontaneous intonation. We are reminded again of O'Casey's words: "I'm just a wandering road-minstrel, singing an odd song at any cross-roads where a few people may have gathered together. . ."14 The songs in the book are a manner of expression for all moods, but they are used particularly well as a manner of protest. For example, when Johnny is chastised by his employers, Mr. Anthony and Mr. Hewson, of Hymdim, Leadim, Leadim & Company (note the play on the names of the employers) and threatened with dismissal, the enraged Johnny breaks into defiant song:

Was he going to go out from the presence of these two God-conceited bastards without a word? Without a sign, even, that he didn't care a snap of his fingers for them? An evil spirit took possession of him. He lurched no longer. He held up his head. He sang out in a voice that was half a shout,

His broad clear brow in sunlight glow'd: On burnish'd hooves his war horse trod:



From underneath his helmet flow'd His coal black curls as on he rode, As he rode down to Camelot.

Johnny felt that the two jaynusus were standing still, in wonderment an' fury at what he was doin'. Then he sang louder than ever,

From the bank and from the river.
He flashed into the crystal mirror.
'Tirra lirra,' by the river
Sang Sir Lancelot. 15

All these musical patterns are underscored by one more comprehensive: the chant. Weaving itself throughout the full six volumes, this measured undertone at times burst into pure expression. The description of the Lord Lieutenant's procession in I Knock at the Door is such a chant, echoing the movement of the parade of officials on their way to the Castle Ball. Because it grows from the sentence which precedes it, and then, at the end, is a part of the sentence which follows it, the chant is incorporated into the life of the book. For six pages, it moves the procession through the mind of the reader:

- Here's a crowd of them coming, said Ella excitedly, here's a crowd of them coming quick and fast, thick and last, comin' thro' the rye, comin' thro' the streets, coming to

THE CASTLE BALL

As far as the eye could see or the mind wander, the Dublin streets were a running stream of landau, victoria, coupe, brougham, coach, and cab forcing a way to the Castle Yard, each vehicle heavy with the precious bodies and souls of earls, barons, bishops, ambassadors, judges, privy councillors,



right honorables, most honorables, archdeacons, spiritual pastors, and masters and mistresses,

Sailors goo-goos in blue, white and gold,

Soldiers goo-goos in black, scarlet, and gold.

Top-heavy and stern in shakoo or busby, in helmet or bearskin,

finished off with a hackle or ball, a spike or a plume.

not a speck of the dust of the earth on their skin or their clothes,

all others cock-hatted, knee-breeched, and sword-girded,

exhilarant all on their way to their master.

with their ladies in silks and their ladies in satins.

or swathed in poplin all finely brocaded,

and wearing rich lace from Valenciennes city,

made haughty by living through hundreds of years,

straight to the core of the Castle they streamed,

or they sauntered at ease talking lightly of things that had passed or were present, while soldiers saluted or stood to attention,

stood stiff to attention, busy blasting the lot though their lips

never moved,

stood blasting the stir that kept them alert standing stiff to attention, while heavy police in dull blue and bright silver . . . 16

And on the pageant continues. But suddenly, we hear the rowdy refrain of Little Brown Jug, at first quiet and uncertain and then growing in power to impose its joy of a contrasting life on the magnificent processions:



hurried past hurried fast on to the ballroom, where the silks and the satins flourished flounces and fans, in the chippendaled, palm-spotted, chandeliered ballroom, there the couples were welting away on the floor in a giddy gavotte,

My wife and I lived all alone in a little log hut we called our own,

legs lift and look from flying flounces and a bustle on each backside bounces.

She loved gin, and I loved run I tell you what, we'd lots of fun,

while the right reverends, most reverends, and reverends sadly mouched round the chippendaled, sheratoned banks of the room, spiritually dead to the rollicking music of the red-coated, gold-braided, heavy-epauletted, tight-trousered military band making things merry and bright for the world,

Ha, ha, ha, you and me, little brown jug don't I love thee. . . . 17

And always behind this rhythm is the frightened and lonely Sean, the man and the character, fighting what he feels is a lonely and thankless battle. His frustration is expressed in a rhythmic protest.

Linked with the rhythm of chant are the monologues of the books, continuous rolling passages of the private thoughts of a character, which are contrasted with the outside environment surrounding them. This is the stream-of-consciousness technique, conversationally oriented to Sean's ever-present audience, allowing the reader to listen in and share the character's feelings. These passages are also good examples



of his rhythmic use of words, for they are in the style of Ella's thoughts, quoted in Chapter I to demonstrate how completely O'Casey can enter the mind of another character. But perhaps the best examples of this technique are the monologues of Johnny. Consider this passage, for instance, on the thoughts and feelings of a wet and bedraggled Johnny forced to brave the rain, go to church, and drip through the service:

. . . for there's Hunter goin' to preach settlin' his glasses on his nose 'n coughin' a little before startin' his sermon, sayin' somethin' about becoming followers of the Lord having heard the word in much affliction he rambled on an' rumbled on an' gambled on an' ambled on an' scrambled on an' mummymummy-mumbled on an' yambled on an' yumbled on an' scambled on an' scumbled on an' humbled on an' grumbled on an' stummy-stummystumbled on an' tumbled on an' fumbled on an' jumbled on an' drumbled on an' numbled on an' bummy-bummy-bumbled on, while here 'm I sittin' in the pew shiverin' cold as cold can be with me wet clothes clingin' to me back 'n stickin' to me legs.

At last the sermon ends, an' up we get on our pins to sing a hymn, fortified forth in Thy name, oh Lord, I go, my daily labor to pursue; Thee, only Thee, resolved to know, in all I think, or speak, or do, well, so I will, so help me God, to stand in me trousers without lettin' me legs touch them. Kneelin' down we get the blessing' an' then stream down the aisles towards the door into the porch to see the rain pouring outa the heavens and peltin' off the pavement. 18

The monologue is also sometimes used to dramatize the thoughts of some historical or mythological characters, and they become a part of the life around them. These people are



reincarnated to take part in the actual life of the Irish people, and even take part in the events of the times, so that they appear not only in monologues, but in lively dialogues with living persons. These imaginary dialogues are treated in the same way as the other dialogues of the books, so that the figures of Dublin's past are as much of its life as the figures of the present. For instance, Sean made his way home from work one day to find

. . . St. Lawrence O'Toole gesticulating with his crozier, standing tiptoe like a ballet dancer on his pedestal, and sometimes leaning down towards the street so that you were in fear he'd come tumbling down any minute. Shouting away the saint was to the crowd below, and Sean, when he had pushed his way forward, found it was a tirade against Shaw, while Professor Mcgennis in his acodemnical gown held on to the saint's skirt to keep him from falling. --- I'm telling yous, shouted the saint, that Shaw said there wasn't a single creditable established religion in the world. An' they say a sayin' man said it. He's mad, an' unashamed of it! 19

As this lecture continues, Shaw appears on the edge of the crowd to shout a rejoinder. And St. Lawrence O'Toole chastises St. Patrick (the statue on a pedestal across the square from him) for letting this kind of author gain popularity while he himself was off his pedestal to get a drink.

As well as the musical repetition of words and patterning of sentences, O'Casey plays with the sense of words. Puns are used frequently to add further implications to his



sentences. Some quick O'Casey puns: "Religion is the only d'hope of the workers;" 20 "All was quiet as a none breathless in madoration;" 21 "Eamonn de Valera, the daring young man on the flying tripeace." 22

The implications of the O'Casey words are further expanded by his use of symbolism. As Johnson, Bierman, and Hart, have remarked:

What the Players say will seem at first the most obvious key to what the play means; in the end, especially in the greatest plays, the imagery will reveal the play's meaning in subtler but more comprehensive ways. 23

This is true for O'Casey, and his symbolism often surpasses words. T.S. Eliot, in "Preludes", after watching " . . . the night revealing/The thousand sordid images . . .," and the small life actions ". . . behind a city block . . ." writes:

I am moved by fancies that are curled Around these images, and cling: The notion of some infinitely gentle Infinitely suffering thing.24

This is the kind of vision behind O'Casey's symbolism, and in his narrative the activities of his fellow Dubliners, "behind a city block", are given a universal importance by his realization of the implications of their lives, of the "fancies that are curled" about the scenes that he sees.

For example, when watching the Illuminations on Victoria Day, young Johnny sees a crowd of Dublin citizens



demonstrating against the display. The tram he and his mother are riding begins to leave, ordered away by the police, but Johnny catches a final significant glimpse of the scene:

The last sight that Johnny saw, as the tram moved slowly away, was the mounted police making a galloping charge towards Dame Street, in the middle of a storm of boos and stones and bottles; and a lone huddled figure lying still in the street, midway between the bank and the college, almost hidden in the folds of a gay green banner.25

Sean always has the sense of the "infinitely suffering thing" and catches this mood quickly in the image of Ireland as the man in the street, suffering for his battle for the Green, oppressed not only by the bank and the college and by the British, but also by his patriotism for Ireland, by the very "gay green banner" curled about him.

All this is heightened by O'Casey's superb dramatic use of the past-present tense. All drama, performed or read, has a sense of immediacy. So does the autobiography. O'Casey is able to successfully draw the audience into the books as a present happening, for this past-present tense has the Biblical quality of recreating the past each time it is read. It happened in the past, but it is also happening now.

There is one last O'Casey technique to consider. It is his use of effective narrative prose to redeem situations that would otherwise lack vitality. John Gassner emphasizes this in an introduction to The Selected Plays of Sean O'Casey.



He writes:

A histrionic manifestation is his [O'Casey's] rhetoric. Whether motivated by characterization, as so admirably in the earlier plays, or whipped up more arbitrarily by the author's own excitations, this rhetoric is music, therefore forgivable, and theatre, therefore useful. It adds a dramatic dimension lacking in the work of tinny playwrights to which we have been accustomed in the common-place theatre. 26

And J.C. Trewin, in an Introduction to <u>Three More Plays</u> by O'Casey, writes: "Let us say now that, of the dramatists of our time, Sean O'Casey has known most certainly what the word can do."²⁷ From the first to the last page of the autobiography, O'Casey's technical word ability rarely falters, so that 'prose style' is a technique he has improved simply by using it. So it is with the other particular techniques just discussed. None of them are totally original, but O'Casey has made them, through their excellent application, his own.



CHAPTER IV

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND O'CASEY'S DRAMA

Sixteen years elapsed between the beginning and the conclusion of the autobiographies, a time in which O'Casey had developed from a man of little reputation with only three dramas published and preformed, to a man of established merit as a writer, not only of plays, but also of articles, short stories, expository collections, and the autobiographies. Some development and change in style would be expected of any writer under these circumstances, and even more so with O'Casey, for he always considered himself an experimental dramatist, convinced of the necessity of development in the form of the "Dramatists cannot go on imitating themselves," he wrote, "and when they get tired of that, imitating others. They must change, must experiment, must develop their power, or try to, if the drama is to live." Of course, his experiments resulted in unconventional drama that at times confused and puzzled his audience, and certainly many critics. O'Casey, believing in his own vision, persisted, and produced his own unique style.

This style is as clearly evident in the autobiography as in his drama. Interestingly, too, the style in the



autobiography parallels the styles of the various periods when he was writing plays. Both reflect O'Casey's strong urge to find a new style, and both demonstrate a very marked change from the earlier writing to his later accomplishments. An examination of the development in the style of the drama helps explain and clarify the forces behind the change in the autobiography.

O'Casey, has almost formularized O'Casey's dramatic method in order to explain O'Casey's development in the technique of drama. In his attempt to define the writer's methods he sacrifices emphasis upon what must be called O'Casey's uniqueness, and tries instead to compare him to other writers and explain his style to those who are rather embarrassed to find that O'Casey's style fits no formula but his own. However, Hogan's particular conception of the O'Casey style is worth examining, because it sets the change of style clearly before us.

To begin with, he prefers to call O'Casey's seeming formlessness complexity (although perhaps O'Casey would not appreciate this) and he devotes two chapters of his book to comparing this complexity with what he calls the second structure of drama. The change in O'Casey's style he regards as a development from the first structure of drama to the second structure, the style of greater complexity. Hogan draws



parallels between O'Casey's later style and Chekov's, since the Russian dramatist is a good example of the second structure.

The first structure Hogan defines as the traditional kind of drama, described by those four formidable words;

Prostasis, Epistasis, Catastasis, and Catastrophe, or in other words, it is a drama with a strong plot development and clear order - a beginning, middle, climax, and ending.

The second structure develops and departs from this. Hogan says it has far more 'complexity' for it strings numerous contrasting scenes on only the merest thread of plot, thus allowing a good deal of irony, juxtaposition, and digression. This usually results in a play within a play, or an interior and exterior action where the narrative framework of the play is garnished with another intrigue or development which results from the dialogue, interaction and tension between the characters and suggests something entirely different from the exterior plot.

For this reason, characterization in this second style is often as important as the plot, and all of these, that is, the interior and exterior plots, the digressions, juxtaposition of scenes, and the characterizations, are integrated in the complex whole, in which the sub-plot is made an integral part of the main plot.

Clearly, the second structure sacrifices some of the unity of a single-action progressive-plot drama, demanding



more intricacy, both on the part of the author and the audience. O'Casey's dramas, writes Hogan, all have elements of this second structure, the later plays having more than the early ones.

Hogan's categories cannot be completely accepted. Granted, O'Casey's drama does have the interior and exterior plots, but they are not as opposed to each other as Hogan would suggest. Rather, they are both facets of the one underlying idea of the play, and all parts act in an almost organic unity. Or, as O'Casey once remarked in regard to the form of his plays:

A jewel moved about in the hand shows many flashes of light and color; and the human life, moved about by circumstances of tragedy and comedy, shows more than many flashes of diversity in the unity of its many-sided nature.

It is also clear that characterization is important in O'Casey's drama - yet characterization is emphasized less as his drama develops, so Hogan's statement that the second structure depends heavily on characterization is not completely applicable to O'Casey's later style. And he did not change his style in order to give his dramas any more complexity or irony (surely there is enough of both in The Plough and the Stars), nor did he forsake old rules merely to turn to new ones. He changed simply because he wanted to express more than his early style would permit; because his early style was not "enough". Here it is in his own words:

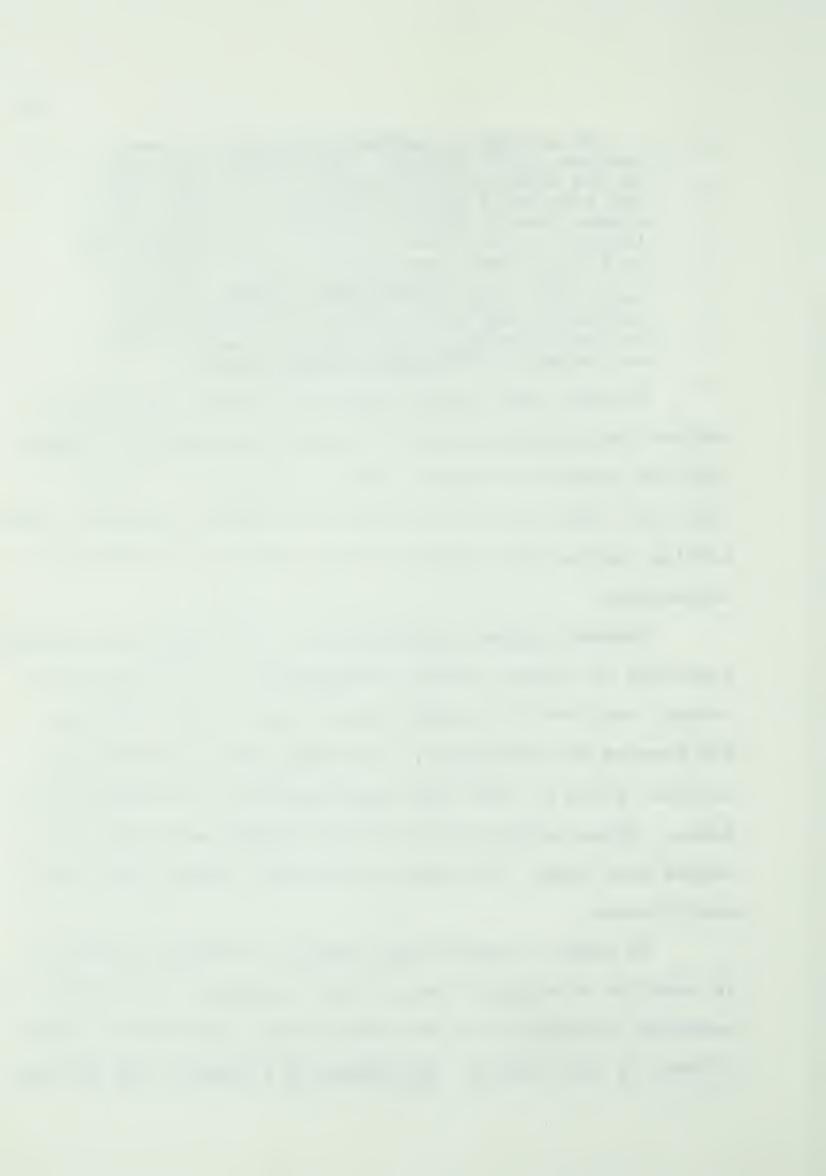


To me what is called naturalism, or even realism, isn't enough. They usually show life at its meanest and commonest, as if life never had time for a dance, a laugh, or a song. I always thought life had a lot of time for these things, for each was a part of life itself, and so I broke away from realism into the chant of the second act of The Silver Tassie. But one scene in a play as a chant or a work of musical action and dialogue was not enough, so I set about trying to do this in an entire play, and brought forth Cock-a-doodle-Dandy.

O'Casey used whatever genres he thought necessary to achieve the effect he wanted, coupling the mixture of genres with the mixture of scenes. The need for life in drama meant the need for song and dance and musical expression, forgetting realism and emphasizing the author's own manner of expression.

However, Hogan's application of the "first" and "second" structure to O'Casey clearly demonstrates to us that he did change, and that this change puzzled most of his audience. But knowing his philosophy, the change must be accepted as natural, since he felt that experimentation was necessary to drama. Since nothing alive did not develop and change, he argued that drama, if it was to be vital, should follow the same process.

In order to examine the change in O'Casey's plays it is possible to examine them in four categories. The first category is evident from the first plays, the ones for which O'Casey is most famous: The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the



Paycock, and The Plough and the Stars. O'Casey was beginning to use techniques of expressionism in The Plough and the Stars, where the second act is a visionary chant. This second act of The Silver Tassie is the beginning of the second stage, an experimental stage, in which he makes use of fantasy, whimsy, farce, satire, burlesque, symbolism, melodrama, and expressionism, as in Within the Gates, Purple Dust, and Oak Leaves and Lavender. In The Star Turns Red and Red Roses for Me O'Casey has entered the third stage, one which Robert Hogan calls the stage of prophet drama, where Sean combines his experimental techniques with prophecy and explicit teaching, often at the expense of dramatic impact. Here his plays are built around his own ideology, and he fills his plays with his message, thinking, perhaps, of incorporating propaganda into a play while still keeping it good theatre. Shaw managed this, and O'Casey admired him for it, and he wrote:

No one can write about ideas without creating persons to express them; but it is one thing to have an idea in a head and quite another to place it in a play. It takes a master-mind to do that so that it will appeal to the imagination of an audience. Shaw and Ibsen are masters of this fancy. Shaw's plays are packed with punches for all kinds of reforms, yet there's hardly one of them that isn't glittering with the fanciful guile of a dramatist.

Finally, O'Casey creates a style which combines elements of all the above. Here neither his purpose nor his method



obliterate his drama. These dramas are Cock-a-doodle-Dandy,

The Bishop's Bonfire, and The Drums of Father Ned. This
style is the fourth and last of these stages, the final style
in which all the elements of the other works are integrated.

The early plays are based upon melodrama, but the plots are strong, and the characterization rich and vital. These plays are a kaleidoscopic tapestry of character and action, with only overtones of O'Casey's future directions in writing. Juno and the Paycock and The Plough and the Stars certainly have some of the irony and the tragi-comedy of the later style, and both have the double structure Hogan mentions - the interior and exterior plots. After The Plough and The Stars O'Casey makes full use of his own unique structure, although the heavy expressionism in The Star Turns Red and Red Roses for Me thwarted its complete development in those plays. Perhaps he learned from these plays, as Hogan put it. "the dangers of extreme abstraction and explicit presentation", 5 for thereafter he used expressionism only as a contributory technique in his mixture of methods, and in Cock-a-doodle-Dandy and The Drums of Father Ned his style is composite, 'a whole composed of slices of farce, melodrama, heightened realism, the bizarre, the ludicrous, and the fantastic."6

When O'Casey published I Knock at the Door, he had just entered the second stage of his dramatic style with The Silver



Tassie and Within the Gates, where he begins to make heightened use of song, fantasy, and techniques of expressionism. Consequently, the first book of the autobiography is the closest to the early style, and of the six volumes it is the one which has the strongest plot and the clearest narrative. O'Casey demonstrates his dramatic ability in his portrayal of young Johnny and his troubles with the world, for they are among the most dramatic incidents in all of his writing. This book, although most prominently based on the early style than any of the others, also has the qualities O'Casey was beginning to use in his dramas: song, chant, lyricism, dream-like scenes, contrast, and fantasy. But the book incorporates these qualities easily into its narrative, increasing the dramatic effect without disturbing the real-life adventure.

Partially because of this, I Knock at the Door would would be an excellent adventure story for children. O'Casey never forgets he is portraying a young boy, so that the use of fantasy in the book often gives it a fairy-tale quality which complements the plot, but does not obliterate it. For instance, when Johnny is faced with the reality of going to school and being tormented by the teacher, he dreams a dream school - and the whole chapter of that name is like a glowing fairy tale told in the simple language of childhood perception.



And the two boys that were like birds, with the spears in their hands, led him gently through the open gate. And when they felt that he was trembling they said unto him, Let not your heart be troubled, little boy. Then they stretched out their spears in front of his eyes, and he saw that the points of the spears were made of a sweet chocolate covered cunningly with the thinnest of silver tissue. And they walked through a lovely avenue of laurestilillium covered with great trumphet-shaped flowers that were a delicate white in the morning, a ruddy gold at midday, and a deep dark crimson when the sun went down; then through a narrower avenue of crocuaxenillium, to a tiny glade filled with the greenest of grass and newest and freshest of blossoms where, on a bank of primroses, sat a greybearded old josser, who asked Johnny his name and where he lived, then wrote it all down with a gold pen, having for its nib a gleaming emerald, on a great big white blackboard trimmed with jewels.

This dream-land grows into social comment, yet still it is in keeping with the fairy-tale aura of the dream. In the continuation of the dream-fairy-tale, the boy is bathed and then allowed to wander over 'hill, meadow, and dale' to play with the other children.

On every little hill was a tower, and on top of every tower was a watcher to see if any child had grown tired so that he could be made to sit down and rest in beds of moss; or if a kid was anyway hungry the watcher ordered him a slice of currant bread and jam, and each watcher had a needle ready threaded to act should a seam burst or a button fly among the frelicking children.

The wistfulness with which Johnny dreams of such happiness, the feeling that behind him is O'Casey saying 'this should be



for all children' makes it clear that this fantasy has a point. But the point is not over-emphasized and the fantasy remains imaginatively naïve.

In the later volumes, however, the use of fantasy develops a point O'Casey wishes to make. While still imaginative, it is in keeping with an older and sophisticated audience, and the point of the fantasy more in keeping with an older and more assured Sean, who is much more anxious to press his ideas upon us. In order to illustrate certain points imaginatively, O'Casey brings historical and mythological figures to life, and has them present their various points of view in the streets of Dublin. Adam and Eve go modern, and act like any other married couple, as real people faced with living in a wilderness. They are interviewed by a reporter, in the Garden, with Sean peeping through the bushes and looking on:

Over to the right, near to the mouth of a big, deep, dark dugout, squatted a hairy man and a hairy woman, and Sean knew at once that they must be Adam and Eve, for they had their arms round each other. Before them a thin, short man, sitting on his hunkers, had a flint sheet on his bare knees, and a flint pen was scratching along it, so Sean knew he was busy interviewing them.

0 0 0 0

Well, Now, about the way the two of you came out of what was once the great deep, eh?

- It was all very simple, said Adam. The Man above just pointed a finger at a tuft of moss and said, Come out of it, Adam! And out I had to come.



- And then? inquired the newsman.

 Then things went like clockwork: the lovely fish in the sea; the lovely birds in the air; the wonderful animals on the land all of which were named and addressed by me; and then, when the Man above saw I was lonely, he put me asleep, took a rib out of my side, and, pointing a thumb at Eve, made herself there.
- Oh, did he now? said Eve, suddenly sarcastic. That's a one-sided story if y' ask me! There wasn't a flash of a second of time lost between the making of us, as everyone knows. We were man and maid together or we weren't made at all; and took precedence over all other living things.
- You were an afterthought, I'm telling you! said Adam sharply. Its there in the book for anyone to see. 9

The charm of childhood is gone and the fantasy is now adult fantasy. And Sean makes good use of it. Before the Adam and Eve episode is over, the interview is broken up by a horrible gory fight between three dinosaurs (which O'Casey infers is the sub-conscious) and the savageness of the garden makes Eve convince Adam that they must leave the garden and seek a better life, for themselves and their children. O'Casey is allowed to make a point about the idealization of the Bible and the savagery of God's created world.

It is in the second book of the autobiography that the opinions of O'Casey begin to become too clearly evident, and it was at this time that he was beginning to write plays with a clearly stated message as well. By the time the third book of the autobiography was published (Drums Under the Windows), O'Casey had just published Red Roses for Me and



The Star Turns Red, which were dramas of explicit teaching and prophecy. The opinions in the books are often the same as those in the plays. In fact, the same incidents and characters occur both in the dramas and the autobiographies. The street scene of <u>Pictures in the Hallway</u> quoted in this thesis (Chapter III, page 60) is a scene also portrayed in <u>Red Roses for Me</u> at the beginning of the third act.

And statements of prophetic ideology are shared between book and drama as well: the following is a passage from The Star Turns Red, a drama which is almost completely a lyrical chant glorifying Communism. The characters, fighting the priests that O'Casey portrays as forces of backwardness and ignorance, see the red star rise prophetically in the sky:

- Red Jim Look at the star, look at the star, man! The crescent has come, and the crescent has gone; the cross has come and the cross is going! (To the Red Guards) What is left to take their place, comrades?
- Red Guards (loudly and in chorus). The Red Star is rising! The Red Star will take their place and burn in the heavens over our heads forever!
- Red Jim We fight on; we suffer; we die; but we fight on. Our alter is the spinning earth, chanting reveille to the newborn, sounding the Last Post over those sinking back into her bosom when the day's well-done work is over.
 - Our saints are those who fall beating a roll on the drum of revolution.
 - We fight on; we suffer; we die; but we fight on.
 - Till brave-breasted women and men, terrac'd with strength,



Shall live and die together, co-equal in all things;
And romping, living children, annointed with joy, shall be banners and banneroles of this moving world!
In all that great minds give, we share;
And unto man be all might, majesty, dominion,

and power!
Red Guards (in chorus). Now and for evermore! 10

The play ends when Julia, having just lost her lover to the Red cause, is told to stand up and join in the triumph he died for. Here are the stage directions for the expression-istic ending of the play:

Julia stands up with her right fist clenched. The playing and singing of "The Internationale" grow louder. Soldiers and sailors appear at the windows, and all join in the singing. The Red Star glows, and seems to grow bigger as the curtain falls. Kian alone - the one disconsolate figure in the crowd - stands, sad, gazing down on the stiff face of his dead brother. Il

These sentiments and their expression closely compare with passages in <u>Inishfallen</u>, <u>Fare Thee Well</u>. Here is O'Casey, talking directly to the audience:

But steady workers, here and elsewhere steady poor of the poorer places; your day is coming. The Red Star shines over the Kremlin, once the citadel of the Czars. Those who tried hard to shake it down have fled homewards, helpless against the might and good courage of a half-starved people. The Red Soldiers with their Red Calvary are on the frontiers, are on the sea-edges of their vast land. Socialism has found a home, and has created an army to patrol around it. The Red Star is a bright star.

This paragraph continues for half a page, then breaks



up into a chant very much like that in the play, and centered upon the same values.

> Morning star, hope of the people, shine on us!

Star of power, may thy rays soon destroy the things that err, things that are foolish, and the power of man to use his brother for profit so as to lay up treasures for himself where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.

Red Mirror of Wisdom turning the labour in factory, field, and workshop into the dignity of a fine song:

Red Health of the sick, Red Refuge of the afflicted, shine on us all.

Red Cause of our joy, Red Star extending till thy five rays, covering the world, give a great light to those who sit in the darkness of poverty's persecution.

Herald of a new life, of true endeavor, of common-sense, of a world's peace, of man's ascent, of things to do bettering all things done;

The sign of Labour's shield, the symbol on the people's banner; Red Star, shine on us all!13

The similarities in thought and expression between the play and the autobiography are obvious. As in The Star Turns Red and Red Roses for Me, the message largely overpowers the narrative of the autobiographies written after Drums Under the Windows. O'Casey's earlier use of new techniques, now influenced heavily by his didacticism, is the stage in which O'Casey remains to the end of the autobiographies. Although he had written <u>Cock-a-doodle-Dandy</u>, the first drama written in his final style, by the time he had published Inishfallen,



Fare Thee Well, in 1949, O'Casey did not drop his opinionative method in the autobiographies and continued to write them much the same way in which he wrote his articles. Sunset and Evening Star, the last book, was published in 1954, and then O'Casey published his last plays of the final style:

The Bishor's Bonfire and The Drums of Father Ned. But their final unified style is not achieved in the autobiographies.

O'Casey's change and development as an artist, then, clearly influences the autobiography as much as the dramas. So did his development as a man. The autobiography was written over a period of sixteen years, a long period in which to maintain the same artistic vision, and this fact alone could account, in part, for the changes in style. Also O'Casey seems to have begun the books with his children in mind, as an offering to them of the story he wished to share with them. This may be part of the reason for their fascinating adventure-narrative. I Knock at the Door is dedicated to his children:

TO

BREON and NIALL 14

but the later volumes are more often dedicated to heroes of O'Casey's whom he praises in his books, as in the dedication to Drums Under the Windows:

TO



A Gael of Gaels, one-time Professor of Irish in Maynooth College. In a fight for Irish, he collided with arrogant Irish bishops, and was summarily dismissed without a chance of defending himself; taking the case to Rome, he was defeated there by the subtlety of the bishops, helped by a sly Roman Rota, ending his last proud years in poverty and loneliness.

Forgotten, unhonored, unsung in Eire, here's a Gael left who continues to say Honour and Peace to your brave and honest soul, Michael O'Hicky, till a braver Ireland comes to lay a garland on your lonely grave. 15

The dedication of Rose and Crown is prophetic, calling to the young in all lands:

TO THE YOUNG OF ALL LANDS, ALL COLOURS. ALL CREEDS:

Shadows of beauty.
Shadows of power:
Rise to your duty
This is the hour! 16

By reading the dedications we can see that O'Casey has changed the approach to his books, for message and prophecy becomes more apparent after the first volume. He is obviously more interested in swaying his audience with his opinions, since his dedications are usually flags of defiance flown in the face of the onlooker.

O'Casey seems moreover, to have lost interest in portraying his life, particularly as the books approached the time of his real life. The last books have fewer chapters than the first (I Knock at the Door has twenty-three, Sunset and



Evening Star has fourteen), yet the later books cover longer periods of time, so that Sean describes fewer real incidents of his life, and instead gives us fleeting impressions, mixed with opinionated passages which are much like his articles.

The change in O'Casey drama then is parallelled in his autobiographies. The plays develop from those strongly based on melodrama to plays of a complex and experimental nature. The autobiographies follow a related pattern of development as they move from a central concern with incident and naive fantasy to a concern with opinionated or prophetic statement. In addition to the observable pattern of stylistic change, the plays and the books share common themes and even common incidents and characters. It is evident, therefore, that O'Casey's self-appraisal is consistently dramatic, and that it shares this quality with his plays.



CONCLUSION

The conclusion is clear that there was always a relationship between the autobiographies and the dramatic writings of Sean O'Casey. The dramatic principles, discussed in Chapter I, are the principles which also governed the autobiographies. That the drama must have life, that it must be experimental, that it need not be realistic, and that it must be expressive of the artist as a man, of his imagination, sentiment and opinions, are the O'Casey concepts of artistic creation. These concepts result in the unique structure of the autobiographies, which is discussed in Chapter II. structure is one based on the books themselves, and their subject and philosophy, not an external form to be filled with words. It is a structure closer to that of a symphony, based on a current of feeling, a progression throughout the books, resulting from their subject, their theme, and their manner of expression.

O'Casey's choice of words furthers this rhythmic approach to writing, and they become the instruments of the dramatic symphony. As was demonstrated in Chapter III, the words move to the varied measure of song, chant, poetry, repeated words, repeated statements, similar sounding words in a rhythmical context, monologues, dialogues, and the like.



They express the basic tension of the books, between O'Casey and his world, and between the conflicting elements in that world.

This "orchestra located in O'Casey's larynx" is perhaps the key to the structure, style, and expression of both the autobiographies and the plays. Comments about the music of O'Casey's plays are as easily applied to his autobiographies: John Gassner, in an introduction to a collection of O'Casey plays writes that O'Casey characters "are often to be found "lilting when they are most alive", and O'Casey makes arias out of his emotions". And we have O'Casey's own words, about his play, The Drums of Father Ned:

. . . and the form was an effort to do something like R. Strauss did in his music to Don Chichote, picture following picture in sounds of lovely music.

Clearly this is also the form of the autobiographies.

The close relationship between O'Casey drama and O'Casey autobiography was discussed in Chapter IV, when the style of O'Casey's plays, and its development as he gained experience as a writer, was compared with the style of the six books about his life. Again, the autobiographies reflect the same influences, and show a development from the first book, which is closest to the "early" style, to the style of the prophetic plays, which is similar to the last books. Many of the same experiences are repeated in the plays and the



autobiographies, and they are treated dramatically in both modes.

The following quotation refers directly to O'Casey's plays, yet it can be as easily applied to the autobiographies. The emphasis on the imagination and spontaneity of the author, as well as on the contraries of style found in his work should be noted. These are characteristics found in all of his writing.

That imagination is variable, too. Sometimes it produces an intensification of plausible characterization and events, as in Juno and The Paycock, and The Plough and the Stars. We then get O'Casey's poetic and high voltage symbolism. Or O'Casey turns to the invention of wild and beautiful improbabilities, and the results are indefinable, although we call them fantasy. whether growing naturally out of the playwright's material, superimposed by allegorical intention, or just freely invented, the poetic invention receives support from a fine flamboyance, a personal bravura both comic and heroic. A histrionic sensibility, indeed, is ever present in his work; it is thoroughly delightful when comic, if sometimes out of control when heroic. And whether or not always acceptable, it is plainly natural to O'Casey; its appearance has unmistakable spontaneity.4

"Spontaneity" - as the song to the bird - or, as O'Casey said of himself, "I'm just a wandering road-minstrel, singing an odd song at any cross-roads where a few people may have gathered together". 5 O'Casey's style is his natural expression and is in evidence in everything that he writes.



Therefore, although the autobiographies are not plays, they are certainly extensions of O'Casey drama.







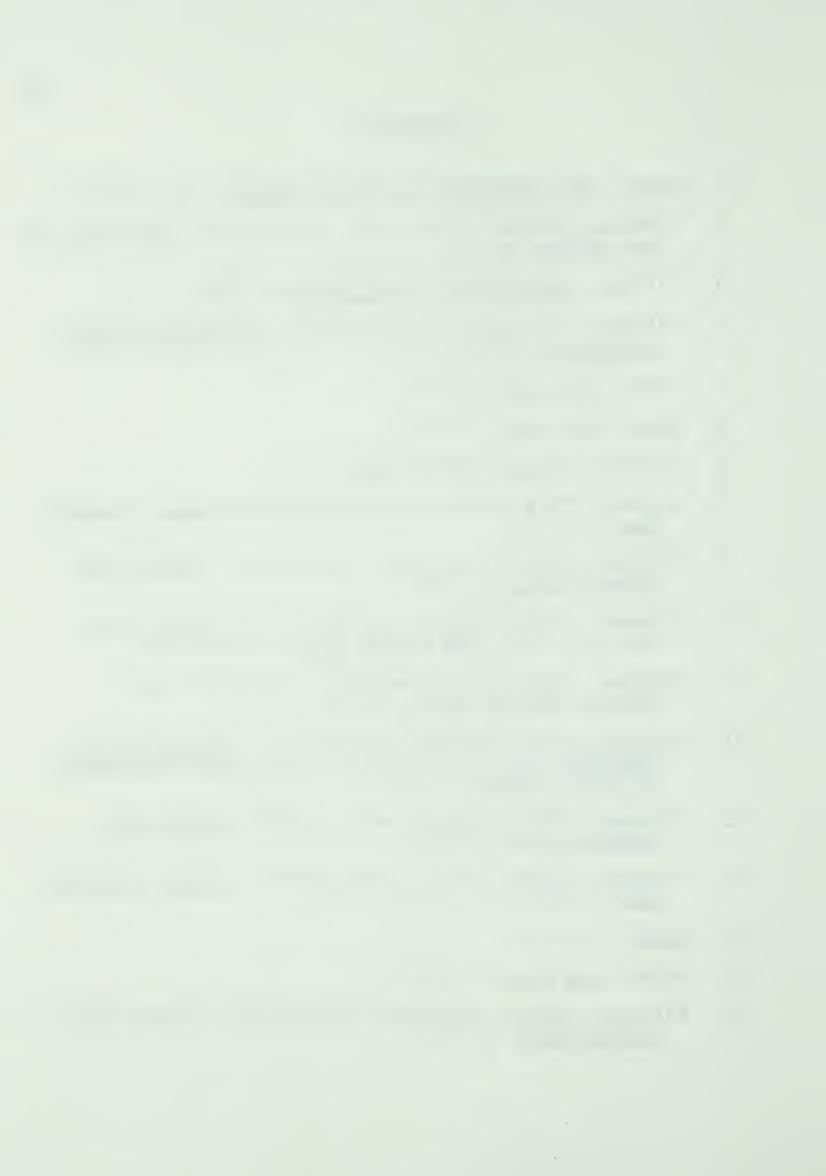
INTRODUCTION

- 1. Sean O'Casey as quoted by Robert Hogan, The Experiments of Sean O'Casey, p. 183.
- 2. O'Casey in a letter to Robert Hogan dated March 3, 1958, Hogan, The Experiments of Sean O'Casey, p. 135.
- 3. Ronald Peacock, "The Art of Drama", p. 14.
- 4. W.A. Armstrong, Introduction, "The Irish Dramatic Move-Ment," Classic Irish Drama, p. 12.



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- 1. Hogan, The Experiments of Sean O'Casey, pp. 117-118.
- 2. Johnson, Bierman, Hart, ed., Introduction, The Play and the Reader, p. 5.
- 3. O'Casey, Drums Under the Windows, p. 333.
- 4. O'Casey, "O'Casey's Drama-Bonfire", Blasts and Benedictions, p. 138.
- 5. Hogan, op. cit., p. 176.
- 6. Hogan, op. cit., p. 174.
- 7. O'Casey, I Knock at the Door, p. 1.
- 8. O'Casey, "The People and the Theatre", <u>Under a Colored Cap</u>, p. 213.
- 9. O'Casey, "Within the Gates and Without", <u>Blasts and Benedictions</u>, p. 120.
- 10. O'Casey, "Saint Beauve, Patron of Poor Playwriters, Pray for us!", The Flying Wasp, pp. 166-167.
- 11. O'Casey, "The Lark in the Clear Air Still Sings", Under a Colored Cap, p. 141.
- 12. O'Casey, from a letter printed in the Randolph-Macon Bulletin, 1954, quoted by R. Hogan, The Experiments of Sean O'Casey, p. 177.
- 13. O'Casey, "Behind the Curtained World", <u>Blasts and Benedictions</u>, p. 10.
- 14. O'Casey, "Purple Dust in Their Eyes", <u>Under a Colored Cap</u>, p. 265.
- 15. <u>Ibid</u>., p. 265.
- 16. Hogan, op. cit., p. 175.
- 17. O'Casey, "Within the Gates and Without", <u>Blasts and Benedictions</u>, p. 122.



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- 18. Ibid, p. 122-123.
- 19. O'Casey, "Saint Beauve, Patron of Poor Playwriters, Pray for Us!", The Flying Wasp, p. 167.
- 20. O'Casey, "The Play of Ideas", <u>Blasts</u> and <u>Benedictions</u>, p. 25.
- 21. O'Casey, "What Thou Seest, Write in a Book", <u>Blasts</u> and <u>Benedictions</u>, p. 153.
- 22. O'Casey, "From Within the Gates", Blasts and Benedictions, p. 117.
- 23. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 113.
- 24. <u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 116-117.
- 25. O'Casey, "The People and the Theatre", <u>Under a Colored</u> <u>Cap</u>, p. 216.
- 26. O'Casey, in a letter to the New York Times, October 21, 1934, quoted by Robert Hogan, The Experiments of Sean O'Casey, p. 175.
- 27. O'Casey, from a letter to Robert Hogan, quoted by Hogan, The Experiments of Sean O'Casey, p. 173.
- 28. O'Casey, "Cockadoodle Doo", <u>Blasts and Benedictions</u>, p. 143.
- 29. O'Casey, "The People and the Theatre", <u>Under a Colored Cap</u>, p. 217.
- 30. O'Casey, "The Green Crow Caws", <u>Under a Colored Cap</u>, p. 58.
- 31. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 79.
- 32. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 80.
- 33. O'Casey, "From Within the Gates", <u>Blasts and Benedictions</u>, pp. 115-116.
- 34. O'Casey, "Out, Damned Spot", Colored Cap, p. 254.



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35. Hogan, op. cit., p. 175, "his" is substituted for "its" in the quotation.



- 1. Thrall, Hibbard, Holman, A Handbook to Literature, p. 473.
- 2. O'Casey, Sunset and Evening Star, title page.
- 3. O'Casey, Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well, dedicatory page.
- 4. These volumes, Mirror in My House, The Autobiographies of Sean O'Casey, were published in 1954, ten years before O'Casey's death. Since he owned the copywright to at least several of the volumes, he would have to be aware of the title "Autobiographies" as applied to his six books.
- 5. O'Casey, I Knock at the Door, title page.
- 6. Sean McCann, quoting Maire, "The Girl He Left Behind", in The World of Sean O'Casey, pp. 32-33.
- 7. O'Casey, letter to Saros Cowasjee, 31, March, 1959, quoted by Cowasjee, in Sean O'Casey, The Man Behind the Plays, p. 252.
- 8. O'Casey, I Knock at the Door, pp. 100-101.
- 9. O'Casey, Drums Under the Windows, p. 257.
- 10. O'Casey, "Out Damned Spot", Colored Cap, p. 255.
- 11. O'Casey, <u>Drums Under the Windows</u>, p. 165.
- 12. Gabriel Fallon, Sean O'Casey, The Man I Knew, p. 19.
- 13. O'Casey, "Cockadoodle Doo", <u>Blasts</u> and <u>Benedictions</u>, p. 143.
- 14. O'Casey, "Art is the Song of Life", <u>Blasts and Benedictions</u>, p. 78.
- 15. O'Casey, "Behind the Curtained World", <u>Blasts and Benedictions</u>, p. 10.
- 16. O'Casey, I Knock at the Door, p. 159.
- 17. O'Casey, Drums Under the Windows, p. 92.
- 18. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 209.



CHAPTER II - continued

- 19. O'Casey, Sunset and Evening Star, p. 312.
- 20. Hogan, Feathers From the Green Crow, p. 77.
- 21. O'Casey, Drums Under the Windows, p. 40.
- 22. O'Casey, Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well, p. 307.
- 23. O'Casey, "The Play of Ideas", Blasts and Benedictions, p. 24.
- 24. O'Casey, "Out, Damned Spot", <u>Under a Colored Cap</u>, pp. 245-255.
- 25. Johnson, Bierman, Hart, The Play and the Reader, p. 9.
- 26. O'Casey, "Not Waiting for Godot", Blasts and Benedictions, p. 51.
- 27. O'Casey, "Cockadoodle Doo", Blasts and Benedictions p. 144.
- 28. Ibid., pp. 144-145.
- 29. O'Casey, "The Lark in the Clear Air Still Sings", Under A Colored Cap, p. 135.
- 30. Ibid., p. 134.
- 31. O'Casey, "The Green Crow Caws", Under a Colored Cap, p. 59.
- 32. O'Casey, "From Within the Gates", Blasts and Benedictions, p. 115.
- 33. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 115.



CHAPTER III

- 1. O'Casey, "Art is the Song of Life", Blasts and Benedictions, p. 78.
- 2. O'Casey, I Knock at the Door, p. 33.
- 3. David Krause, Sean O'Casey, The Man and His Work, p. 257.
- 4. O'Casey, Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well, p. 12.
- 5. Hogan, op. cit., p. 132.
- 6. O'Casey, Drums Under the Windows, p. 333.
- 7. O'Casey, Pictures in the Hallway, p. 17.
- 8. Hogan, op. cit., p. 1/13.
- 9. O'Casey, Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well, pp. 111-112.
- 10. O'Casey, Pictures in the Hallway, pp. 313-314.
- 11. O'Casey, I Knock at the Door, pp. 128-129.
- 12. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 130.
- 13. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 38.
- 14. Hogan, op. cit., p. 183.
- 15. O'Casey, I Knock at the Door, p. 139.
- 16. Ibid., p. 22.
- 17. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 25.
- 18. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 166.
- 19. O'Casey, Drums Under the Windows, p. 259.
- 20. Ibid., p. 225.
- 21. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 407.
- 22. O'Casey, Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well, p. 2.



CHAPTER III - continued

- 23. Johnson, Bierman and Hart, Introduction, The Play and the Reader, p. 8.
- 24. T.S. Eliot, "Preludes", T.S. Eliot, The Complete Poems and Plays, III, 3-4, and IV, 10-13.
- 25. O'Casey, I Knock at the Door, p. 261.
- 26. John Gassner, Introduction, Selected Plays of Sean O'Casey, p. XIX.
- 27. J.C. Trewin, Introduction, Three More Plays, by Sean O'Casey, p. XVI.



CHAPTER IV

- 1. Hogan, p. 175.
- 2. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 176.
- 3. O'Casey, "Cockadoodle Doo", Blasts and Benedictions, p. 143.
- 4. O'Casey, "The Play of Ideas", Blasts and Benedictions, p. 24.
- 5. Hogan, p. 12.
- 6. Ibid., pp. 12-13.
- 7. O'Casey, I Knock at the Door, p. 136.
- 8. Ibid., p. 137.
- 9. O'Casey, Drums Under the Windows, pp. 265-269.
- 10. O'Casey, "The Star Turns Red", The Collected Plays of Sean O'Casey, II, pp. 351-352.
- 11. Ibid., pp. 353-354.
- 12. O'Casey, Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well, p. 171.
- 13. Ibid., p. 172.
- 14. O'Casey, I Knock at the Door, dedicatory page.
- 15. O'Casey, Drums Under the Windows, dedicatory page.
- 16. O'Casey, Rose and Crown, dedicatory page.



CONCLUSION

- 1. John Gassner, Introduction, <u>Selected Plays of Sean O'Casey</u>, p. XX.
- 2. Ibid., p. XX.
- 3. O'Casey in a letter to Robert Hogan dated March 3, 1958, Hogan, The Experiments of Sean O'Casey, p. 135.
- 4. Gassner, op. cit., pp. XVIII-XIX.
- 5. Hogan, op. cit., p. 183.







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